

THE ARGOSY.

APRIL, 1879.

CALLED TO THE RESCUE.

CHAPTER X.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

WE have already described the house at Ostend, in which Mrs. Dangerfield received Adela Granard, with its spacious reception-rooms, as bare of all comfort as was the fast-waning life of their mistress. They were, however, well enough adapted for such gatherings of curious, half-agitated spectators as from time to time attended the séances of the Professor; and combined several advantages in their arrangement for the better display of his skill in illustrating his popular lectures. Curtains and mirrors artfully placed, with sundry mechanical contrivances for producing light and darkness, played their part in keeping up the desired illusion; and as those who came generally wished to be impressed, or puzzled, it was seldom that any went away disappointed. They would say to each other that it was all trick—that he was a clever conjurer in all but the name—but, nevertheless, there was more in it all than you could account for, and their unbelieving friends must go and judge for themselves.

One of these meetings had been held with tolerable success; and the principal performer, weary with his exertions, had retired to his private apartment to dine. However lightly domestic comfort might be regarded in the other parts of the house, no such carelessness was permitted where the master was concerned. His room, though of moderate size, was handsomely fitted up for ease and convenience, as well as with objects of taste to charm the eye or imagination; and his meals, when taken at home, were supplied by the best

helped him to soup and wine before entering into further conversation; glancing occasionally at the thin, poverty-stricken form and features, as if conscious of the marked difference from his own.

Cosmo Dangerfield was at this time a handsome man, with a portly figure; and though dissipation and excess had begun to leave their trace both on his complexion and features, his personal appearance was too valuable not to be carefully preserved and attended to. No one could accuse him of sharing poor Hester's neglect of externals; expense was no object compared with the effect he laboured, not unsuccessfully, to produce. His lot being cast in a generation that no longer required a sage to wear a flowing robe, trimmed with costly fur, and girdled with a belt inscribed with cabalistic signs, he could only rely on the grave, courteous dignity of his bearing, and the tokens of wealth and distinction with which he was surrounded, for making an impression on the various temperaments with which he came in contact. But he had as many aspects as circumstances required: and the good-humoured familiarity of his conversation with old Justine was not easier to assume than the protecting hospitality extended to his bidden, but tardy, guest.

"I do not wonder at anyone's appetite in such weather. We shall turn into wolves soon, if it lasts. My poor wife seems to shrink up like a withered leaf before it. Here comes a hot cutlet—that will suit your book, I know. I ordered them expressly, remembering your affection for the article."

"Very kind of you," said his medical friend. "Unlike most affection, it has not cooled by absence."

And the celerity with which the viands were despatched confirmed his words, while it increased his entertainer's complacency in watching him.

"Fill M. le docteur's glass, Justine. The new vintage, my good woman; we must have his sanction before trying it on Madame. This weather is terrible work for an invalid."

"The weather is on the turn; the wind is changing," said Mowatt, setting down his empty glass, which the Professor immediately refilled.

"Changing? I am glad to hear it, for I have been getting very uneasy about her state. She was never satisfied till she had sent her daughter away, and now does nothing but fret over the separation; if I could have been spared, I should have been tempted to run over to England and bring the poor child back. Fetch us the rôti, Justine; the doctor is eating nothing."

Mowatt had, in fact, laid down his knife and fork, and was looking thoughtfully at his wine. If he was pondering what had just been said, he did not commit himself by any reply.

"Yes," resumed Dangerfield, after a short silence, as if thinking aloud, "I am uneasy—very uneasy—about her; and so irreparable would be the loss that I cannot contemplate it without a shudder.

Still, something may be done by skill; and, as the authorities here seem quite at fault as to her case, I should like to have your opinion. At any rate, if there is anything on her mind—any wish ungratified—you may be able to find it out and let me know."

Mowatt bowed, and seemed on the point of asking a question, but was checked by the opening of the door. His host, supposing it to be the re-entrance of Justine, began with his pleasant, "Come, good old friend, quick with the roast, before it gets cold," and stopped in his turn on perceiving that the new comer was Miss Joseph.

It was rarely that his self-possession failed him, and though disconcerted for a moment, he rose from his chair with a polite enquiry if he could be of any service—if she would be friendly enough to join them at table, or, at any rate, take a glass of wine. All which civilities met with no further response than is expressed by "declined with thanks," and Miss Joseph turned from him to his visitor.

"When you have done dinner, Mr. Mowatt, Mrs. Dangerfield will be glad to see you."

"I am at her service now—I have dined," said he, attempting to rise, but checked by the Professor's lifted hand.

"You must excuse me, my dear sir: you have *not* dined yet; as these dishes, coming in, bear witness. Mrs. Dangerfield would not forgive me if I allowed you to go before you had had time to rest and refresh yourself. Do you think she would, Miss Joseph?"

"How much she can forgive is more than I can say," returned Miss Joseph. "I will tell her Mr. Mowatt will come in a quarter of an hour."

"Do so; and, that as he has had a long, cold journey, and has a good deal further to go, it was a happy thought of his to look in upon us like this. I will bring him up to her myself, and perhaps she will give us a cup of tea."

Miss Joseph gave the speaker one fixed look, and without further ceremony walked out of the room.

An expressive silence followed her departure. The mask of cordiality had dropped from Cosmo Dangerfield's face, and he sat for some minutes in moody thoughtfulness: which Justine, as she did her office, failed not to notice and speculate upon. Twice had she filled his glass with the rare wine that was "ordered for Madame," before she ventured on a remark.

"Ma'amselle seems to be in Monsieur's confidence to-night."

The low growl that was his only answer perhaps encouraged her to go further.

"As M. le docteur is a compatriote, perhaps Ma'amselle Joseph would let him prescribe for her, and recommend her a little change."

"Go down and make us some of your best coffee, old woman; you understand that better than meddling in my affairs. Mind now!" lifting his finger, "pure coffee, and good."

"Yes, yes," she muttered discontentedly, "I know. It is but waiting a little, and Monsieur will be for making it himself." And as she shuffled out of the room, the Professor rose and bolted the door behind her.

"He needs patience who has to deal with women," was his sententious remark. "Come, Mowatt, you are only trifling; do not forget how much further you have to go."

"I can hardly forget what I have never heard," returned the other, drily; "perhaps you can enlighten me."

"I think I can. How has fortune treated you lately?"

"As she generally treats those who depend upon her. When her sledge wants lightening, she pitches one of us out to the wolves. I've been wolf-fighting lately till I've got into pretty good training, as you may judge by this," lifting first one elbow and then the other, to show how little gloss was left on the cloth. The Professor nodded his head, with a look of sympathy.

"The fact is, Mowatt," he said, "for a clever fellow, you are given to rashness; that may answer once, but it is ruinous in the long run. If you do get a chance, my advice to you, as a friend, is to go in for steadiness, and stick to one thing—one line—till you make it pay. Once get your head well up, and you have that in you that will carry you on, if you choose."

"Thank you, Professor; you are very good. It is rather like advising me, when I sit down to a dinner like this, to be sure to eat it. Your advice shall be followed—when I get the chance."

"It is very near you now, my good fellow: fill your glass—we will open another bottle. That little journey we were speaking of is in the direct road, and all expenses will be paid. How far are you willing to go?"

"I am to avoid rashness, you say. I'll go as far as you can bear me company, to ensure my prudence. And I must be certain of getting back again."

"Quite reasonable. And now, before we go any further, or settle about going at all, I want to tell you that I am seriously uneasy about my wife. Nothing does her any good; and she has lost faith in all the doctors here, except old Thaddeus, who will not come into the house. She once mentioned you as being considered clever: and perhaps you may hit upon something which the others have missed."

"I will do my best. Shall we go to her at once?"

"One word more; you may receive a wrong impression from her manner to me, or from what she may say in the irritable state of her nerves. I am not a man of sentiment, and it is no secret that my home has not been the happiest that could be found; but, if it were, I could not feel more keenly that every day my poor wife's life is lengthened is a day gained—and a gain for which a good price is to be gladly paid."

"Just so—very natural," replied his medical friend. "I have generally found people willing to pay while the danger lasted. But if you are so anxious, why have you been supine till now? Money being no object, you might have had the best advice in London or Paris long ago."

"I might; but it would not have brought me a friend like yourself, who can serve me and his own interest at the same time. Have you had wine enough? We will drink our coffee in the next room, before going to Madame's apartment."

Coffee was waiting when they entered the room in question: but Mr. Dangerfield noticed that his guest, after accepting a cup and stirring it once or twice, left it untasted.

"What is amiss? We rather pride ourselves on Justine's coffee."

"No doubt with reason. But after all that good wine, a cup of Mrs. Dangerfield's tea will suit me better."

"I see: you are going in for prudence in detail, as well as in large matters. To encourage you, I will show you something." He opened a desk and took out some papers. "Do you recognise these?"

The grimace his visitor made was as if a snake had been offered him. "I should think I did: and, of the two, I prefer Justine's coffee."

"They are harmless, old fellow—I have bought them all up. That is one wolf choked off, eh?"

"One? A howling pack of them. My dear Professor, if this is really—"

"Really friendship, and not exchanging a dozen wolves for a jaguar. No fear of that, Mowatt. Whoever works with me must have no other affairs to mind; so, if it is a relief, all the better for both."

"It is an immense one; I own it," said Mowatt, drawing a long breath. "But how I am to give an equivalent, remains for you to show me."

"I will show you in good time. Mowatt," turning sharply upon him, "you got into trouble once—professionally—did you not?"

"I did," said the other, hoarsely. "Why?"

"I wished to be sure it was true—that a mistake of some kind ruined your prospects in England."

"That is not the whole truth. You should add, that I had an enemy, jealous of my skill; and that directly he saw a chance, he ran me down. No one would receive my explanation, or hear my arguments, and I was swept away by the clamour."

"You had an enemy in your own profession?"

"Yes; and being a popular, flourishing man, he had it all his own way with the authorities and the public. He knew I differed from

some of his favourite views ; and, when I was ruined, Sir Marcus Combermere had the field to himself."

The Professor stared in unfeigned surprise. "So ! He is the enemy in question ! This brings matters to a very neat point. Light one of those cigars—unless your prudence is gone mad, you may do it safely. No one ever meddles with anything of mine."

"Mrs. Dangerfield will not object ?" suggested Mowatt, as he selected one of the choice sort before him.

"My dear fellow, when you have listened carefully to me, you will understand our domestic economy too well to need such questions. Up to a certain limit—it covers a pretty wide range—I am master, as I ought to be, everywhere ; and it is only beyond it that I require help. No one in this house ever objects to anything I choose to do—they only resist me passively ; and passive disobedience is the one rock ahead which you must help me to weather."

"In return for the wolves ?"

"Don't mention that—it is only a trifle compared with what I hope to do for you later. Ah, Mowatt, you little know what it is to be considered a rich man, and to know you are only living on a paltry allowance, which may cease any moment."

"I should not object to trying it," said Mowatt, as he knocked off the ashes of his cigar against the lance of a little bronze knight, charging a dragon for the purpose.

"If you did, you would soon understand the aggravation of an income that led you into expenses, and made you incur debts, as a matter of course, while you could not touch the capital, or even encumber it. Over and over again I could have trebled any sum I might have raised ; but, beyond the annual interest, the money has always been out of my reach."

"But this is just what lawyers and settlements are made for," said Mowatt : "to consider a man as the natural enemy of his wife, and still more so of her children. If it is all tied up on Miss Stormount, what is to be done ?"

"It is not tied up at all, except that it is entirely at the disposal of my wife, and secured from me. She can leave it as she pleases—and, of course, has left it to the child."

"Do you mean to say that it is all in the poor lady's own power still ?"

"Entirely."

"The money is in her power, and she in yours ? I do not see the difficulty."

"That I quite understand—no one could see it who had not my experience. I told you just now how hard it was to deal with women, whose very weakness turns your weapon's edge. She has yielded to me on every other point ; on this one she is invulnerable : and I need not say that I have done my best to prove to her she is mistaken."

"I am sure you have. Having failed, you expect me to see what can be done."

"You are right. I have failed, and her health is failing too ; and I may be left with more debts than dividends, unless she can be persuaded that her daughter's interests will be best consulted by her dealing liberally with me. Emily should either be left to my guardianship, with a handsome provision for my life, or the property should be divided between us : in either case, I should engage you as my permanent medical attendant, with a regular salary, and all expenses paid ; while, of course, your present services would be remunerated professionally. You are willing ? Then come and have your cup of tea, for Mrs. Dangerfield keeps early hours. She is quite a recluse in her habits, and you must not be surprised to find her moping almost in the dark. To some nervous systems dulness appears a necessity."

No reply being required, Mowatt attempted none, and followed in silence. The flush which the generous wine had brought into his thin cheeks had changed to paleness ; and though his compressed lips showed no faltering in purpose, there was something distrustful in the look he gave his patron, which it was as well the latter did not see.

Being cautioned against surprise at darkness and dulness, he was the less prepared for the reception that awaited them—while on his companion the effect was evidently disconcerting. With no other help than that of Miss Joseph, Hester had contrived to carry out an idea which had seized her mind directly she heard of his coming. She would not be found a wretched, neglected invalid—she would receive him as her husband's guest, and prove to both that there was nothing alarming in her case, that she was getting better, and could sit up and behave like other people. The room, which Adela had seen so dull and ill-lighted, blazed with wax candles in sconces, collected from the reception rooms, whence also Miss Joseph had brought several of the pots and vases of flowers, which had been provided for the afternoon's lecture. There was a clear fire in the open grate, and the table was spread for a tempting English tea ; over which Miss Joseph presided in hastily donned festal garb of black silk and violet ribbons. A bright shawl had been flung over the faded sofa, on which sat Hester Dangerfield ; she as hurriedly transformed as her apartment. All the resources that her wardrobe could afford to meet the exigencies of the moment had been called into play : her once beautiful hair was dressed with care ; and though the lace of her cap might be discoloured, and her gown have lost its freshness, the one was fine old Mechlin and the other a costly brocade. Her colour was high, and her eyes were full of animation. How she produced the effect was best known to herself ; but, as she said to her faithful friend, who tried to calm her excitement, even by obeying every whim, said resolutely : "He shall have no excuse,

if it is in human power to prevent it, for pronouncing me near enough to my end to justify his fetching Emily. I may die all the sooner, but I will be alive and well to-night!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE BRAHMAH KEY.

THE Professor was not easily put out of countenance. He saw what these tactics meant, and accepted them as a matter of course.

"My dear Hester," he said, as she came forward to greet the visitor, "I am sure you forgive me for insisting on Mr. Mowatt's taking some dinner before coming upstairs: though I believe he has been thinking so much of the cup of tea you promised him, that he hardly did it justice. I dare not let Justine know, Miss Joseph, with what scorn he treated her coffee in comparison."

Hester laughed gaily, as she extended to the guest her thin, burning hand, on which glittered some costly ornaments, the cherished remains of a once overflowing jewel box. "Mr. Mowatt is very good to come near us at all, after being sent for in such weather, for so little cause. There is no persuading gentlemen to let well alone; and if you shiver on a cold January day, you are on the verge of bronchitis, and next door to decline. It is dreadful for travelling, Mr. Mowatt, is it not? Quite unfit for those who are delicate, if nothing else."

"The weather is changing," said the Professor, pointedly. "The thermometer has risen several degrees, and the wind has quite gone round."

"Ah, that accounts for my being so much better. I wondered why my chest felt so relieved. Miss Joseph, is your tea ready? We must do our best to welcome Mr. Mowatt, even if he finds there is not more amiss with his patient than a little sunshine would cure."

"Sunshine is not always to be had for the asking, Mrs. Dangerfield, I am afraid," said Mowatt, cheerfully; "but we must try and find a substitute."

"Oh, you mean warmth indoors—the warmth of hearth and home. Winter can make its way even there; otherwise the rest would matter little."

"You have not much of it in this room; it is like a forcing-house," observed the Professor, looking round inquisitively. "The smell of these plants is very bad for you at night. I will have them sent into the passage."

"You will please to do nothing of the kind. For this evening you have made yourself my visitor; and all you are allowed to do is to drink your tea, make yourself generally agreeable, and admire everything you see. Do you hear, sir?" she added, offering him the cup Miss Joseph had filled, with a tone in her voice, and an arch-

ness in her manner, that for a moment brought back Mrs. Stormount before him, as he had known and bowed before her first.

"To hear is to obey," he said; "and, to combine all commands in one, let me remark, my dear Hester, while trying to drink this excellent but scalding tea, that I always knew you had a pretty hand, but not that you had so beautiful a ring."

"It is a beauty," she replied, slipping it from her finger. "But the stone is rather loose; I am afraid of its falling out."

"Shall I have it reset? It is a splendid diamond."

"Ah, if you were but going to Paris again, I would ask you to take it to that jeweller's in the Palais-Royal. I forgot his name, but I will not trust it to anyone else."

"I will see about it, if you like."

"No, no; if you could take it yourself, at once, and give the order and bring it home with you, I should be easy. The time was, Mr. Mowatt, when if a lady expressed such a wish, a devoted husband would have started by the next train; but we are less chivalrous in the present day."

"If I know the Professor, Mrs. Dangerfield," said Mowatt, smiling, "he is just the man to start off when we are all asleep, and turn up again before we know he is gone. I think you may safely trust him with the ring."

"My dear Hester," said her husband, kindly, "if I did not offer to go at once, as you say, it is because I could not bear to leave you so unwell. But if Mr. Mowatt is tolerably satisfied with you, and thinks I can be spared, it will not be weather or distance that shall stand in my way. I would go farther than Paris to do you service, as you know."

"Yes, yes," she said, with feverish eagerness. "I know you would—I know you would, Cosmo; but I could not spare you to go farther. Paris is far enough—you can go and return so easily; but I should miss you if you went farther than that."

"As you please, my dear Hester. I will leave you now to Mr. Mowatt, and he will give me his opinion afterwards." He put the ring into his waistcoat pocket, and turned to leave the room. Miss Joseph took up a candle, and lighted him along the vestibule. He thanked her carelessly, observing that after such an illumination as she had got up, the passages seemed to be in extra darkness.

"She has had her share of the darkness," retorted the lady, "and when she wishes for more light she shall have it, while I am here."

"No fear of her wanting light while you *are* here, Miss Joseph, for it seems to me that you see and know everything that happens—perhaps a little more."

"What I do see is sad enough, without my inventing anything worse. There, you need not trouble yourself about the vases and things—I moved them all myself, and I will put them back again."

"I have perfect confidence in you, Miss Joseph," was his amiable reply, as he disappeared within his own regions.

She smiled bitterly, and shook her head, knowing in what his confidence consisted—in allowing her, out of the hardly-earned savings of many years, to defray not only all her own expenses, but any extra ones incurred by the invalid.

Mrs. Dangerfield's voice, meanwhile, was becoming more and more excited. She was talking vehemently of the journeys she meant to take when the warm weather came; she felt quite tired of being shut up; and she hated Ostend. Her little girl was in the North of England, and she meant to take a house there; it had always been a dream of hers to live at the Lakes. Then, with a passionate and bitter cry, she clasped her hands above her head.

"Dream of living, did I say? That dream has long been over. Nothing is left for me now but to try and die alone."

She threw herself back on the sofa. Mowatt, who had been watching his opportunity, went up to her at once, with the authority of a medical adviser, and laid his hand on her arm.

"If you will only be calm, Mrs. Dangerfield, and trust yourself to me, I will do all I can for you, and never leave you while you wish me to stay. Come here, Miss Joseph," as that lady re-entered the room; "sit down here and support her a little, but do not let her talk; I cannot judge of her pulse till she is quiet."

Miss Joseph obeyed; and Hester, leaning her weary head on her shoulder, accepted the breathing time, that she might collect her strength for one more effort. Her forced animation dying away, Mowatt could easily read the condition to which she was reduced, and that whatever he meant to do must be done soon. He exerted himself accordingly to soothe and tranquillise her spirits; and, apparently, with so much success that he ventured a remark on the deep anxiety his friend Dangerfield had felt on her account. In a moment he was aware, by the bounding of the pulse he was watching, that this was the secret of the malady.

"He sent for you to see me that you might tell him, and all the world, my condition was hopeless and that my child must be brought home. Mr. Mowatt, he has done what he could to make me poor and helpless, but I am not quite so destitute as to be without the means of rewarding faithful friendship. Shall I find a friend in you?—or only another instrument of torture in a hand that has already too many?"

"There is no hand on earth, I hope, that has power to make me torture anyone, Mrs. Dangerfield, much less a suffering lady. But, if you believe this possible, I have only to wish you good night and go away."

He made a movement to rise. She stopped him with an imploring gesture.

"I will trust you—I put myself in your hands. Prescribe for

me—order everything I am to do—you shall be obeyed to the letter; but do not leave the house for an hour. You shall be comfortably accommodated; Miss Joseph will see to that; and nothing shall be spared that you require: but keep watch over me night and day, if you would not be that thing you so abhor, and which he will try to make you. Where is he now?"

"He said he would wait for my report."

"To know if he may go to Paris. Do you really think I cared about the setting of that stone? I knew it was a bait he could not resist. He will take it away with him, and I shall never see it again; but it may buy me a few days' peace, and that is worth more than my poor Harry's diamonds."

About an hour later, Mowatt went back to his friend.

"Well," said Cosmo Dangerfield, impatiently, for he had been pacing the room in expectation, "what is your verdict?"

"Give me one of your cigars, and I will tell you," said Mowatt, who looked rather exhausted, and, in spite of the cold weather, was wiping his brows. His host made an impatient gesture, but complied with the request, and took one himself. Both smoked in silence for awhile: then Mowatt spoke.

"Her state is critical, but there need be no immediate danger—with precautions. If you want her to live, you must take a different line. You have driven her hard, you say, and you know the result. Try now what humouring will do; carry out her every whim and fancy, whatever they may be. She wants soothing, not fretting, and you best know how to give it her."

"Am I to go to Paris, or not? That is the point."

"I think you had better."

"Then you will stay till I return?"

"I will if you wish it."

"And you will work in my interest, meanwhile?"

"So long as you do not thwart my efforts by exciting her poor nerves to madness."

"And about the child? Ought she not to come back?"

"Certainly not at present; it might be the death of the mother."

"Thank you, my dear fellow. That is just what I wanted to know. I am off by the early train, so I shall wish you good-night. Rather a change of tone," he muttered to himself, after Mowatt left him, "suspiciously sudden. I wonder if she has bought him over? This looks like hidden funds that I did not reckon upon," turning the ring over in his hand, "and uncommonly like a little game to keep me out of the way. If I thought so—well, I'll be even with them both: and perhaps take a longer trip than they suppose."

The Professor was gone when Hester enquired after him the next morning; and as she had foretold, she gained a day or two of peace. Indeed the relief from the fears that had been weighing on her mind, aided by the soothing treatment of her new doctor, on whom she seemed

implicitly to rely, produced so beneficial an effect on her nerves, that she almost thought she had taken a turn for the better. Both to Mowatt and to Miss Joseph, who divided the needful attendance between them, she would talk of her younger days, and former friends. But she rarely touched on her troubles, or alluded to her child; until the receipt of a letter from Adela led to the story of her visit being discussed, and told to the doctor. It gave him the much wished for opening. Cautiously feeling his way, as one who knew well how perilous was the situation, he drew her on to speak of Emily's future prospects and the provision made for her guardianship; and dexterously contrived, without asking a leading question, to moot the point of the implied slight on her husband. Of course he had been handsomely provided for, if he was not left guardian; the insertion of his name as Emily's heir could only be looked upon as a precarious contingency. Would it not—he suggested as a friend honoured with her confidence, and wishing well by all parties—would it not be wise to consider whether Miss Stormount's happiness might not be better secured by avoiding all cause of irritation with a man of so sensitive a temperament and such remarkable gifts—a man likely to be won by trust and generosity, but keenly resentful of anything like neglect? Even if Emily had less money at command, would it not be better that she had gained a friend in one who had so much in his power?

Rather to his surprise, she listened calmly, and seemed to ponder all he said; but declined answering till she had thought it over. The night passed quietly, and she was well enough the next day to receive the visit of an old clerical friend, whom Cosmo Dangerfield had hitherto kept at arm's length. This soothed her, and she slept till evening, when, of her own accord, she renewed the subject.

"Do not think," she said, "that I have not thought of this before, or asked myself again and again, whether I might not buy Emily's ransom with half of her father's wealth. It is simply this—I *dare not*; had it been possible, my present husband would have got it all from me long ago. *I dare not* lay on that innocent child the sin I have myself committed—God forgive me in His mercy! I have been punished for my fault, sorely punished; and I trust the punishment will soon be at an end. Meanwhile you shall both know as much as I may tell you. This key," touching a gilt one belonging to a Bramah lock, "opens that leather box, and in it is a bundle of papers, which must be delivered, unopened, to Adela Granard after my death. Take it, dear Miss Joseph, for to you I look to do it. Mr. Walrond has my will—I have nothing to add to it. This"—she put a small packet in Mowatt's hand—"will, I hope, remunerate you for your kindness. As to my faithful friend here, I have nothing to give her, but the knowledge that she has been everything to me—mother, sister, friend. My child will one day know it, and return it all in love."

There was silence for some little time; Miss Joseph, who had

looked very worn all day, was seized with a fit of convulsive sobbing, without the relief of tears. At Mowatt's urgent entreaty, she consented to lie down and endeavour to recover her exhausted strength ; he promising not to leave the patient unwatched for a moment. Hester was much distressed, and could not be easy till she had called up Justine, who had shown the greatest attention to M. le docteur ever since her master's departure, and had lately expressed more sympathy with the sufferings of Madame. To her Mrs. Dangerfield spoke kindly, gave her a napoleon, and begged her to take care that Mademoiselle had all she required. The old woman seemed touched, and shed a few tears, promising compliance.

"Mademoiselle has done too much ; she wants food and rest," Justine said to Mowatt. "I will see that she has both : and if M. le docteur does not take care, he will be in the same case."

"No fear of that, Justine ; and look here, I must see what you give Miss Joseph. Bring her tray to me first."

"She shall have just what I make for Monsieur, and have made for you every day," said the old woman, huffily. "If that is not good enough, she must go elsewhere."

In due time she brought a tempting basin of soup, and some coffee, both prepared with her best skill ; and, as she suggested, there was enough for both Mademoiselle and the doctor. He agreed ; and having tasted both, sent some of each to the tired nurse, conscious that before the night was over they might want all the strength which it could give them.

Was it imagination ?—or did he feel, after he had seen his patient fall asleep, as if something unusual were at work in his brain, not be-guiling him to slumber at his post, but stirring up every faculty of thought and memory, with an almost painful vehemence, making it difficult to preserve silence, and impossible to be quite still. Had he over-tasked his own powers, and was his broken rest avenging itself by filling his veins with fire ? Perhaps a cup of coffee might quiet his nerves. He was in the act of heating some of Justine's beverage over a spirit lamp, when Miss Joseph suddenly came in, as if walking in her sleep, her eyes open, but her manner strange and unnatural.

"Don't touch that ! don't touch that !" she whispered, hoarsely. "It's not right—it has made me quite ill—I came to warn you"—and it seemed as if, indeed, she had done her utmost, for she staggered to an arm-chair, and in a few seconds was sleeping profoundly.

The truth flashed on Mowatt at once, and he saw the peril he had escaped. Privately devoting Justine and her cookery to future retribution, he took prompt measures for destroying any evil effect on himself from the small quantity he had swallowed ; for his fellow watcher he could do nothing but protect her from the cold, and let her sleep in peace. For two hours his vigil was undisturbed, though sight,

hearing, and touch seemed to be endowed with triple acuteness, in expectation of what was to follow. His patient had grown restless, and he had just put his hand on her pulse, when she suddenly sat up in bed, her eyes staring wildly at the wall, and pointing with her finger at an object that at once brought Mr. Mowatt to his feet.

It was the shadow of some person, on the other side of the bed, and it appeared to be that of a man. Evidently the poor lady thought so, for she uttered a piercing cry. "Harry! Harry! are you come to forgive?"

The shadow vanished instantly, but it had done its work: Hester Dangerfield's weary frame was at rest.

It was an awful moment, even for one to whom such scenes were more or less familiar. The doctor's leading emotion when he had become convinced that all was over, was one of intense resentment at the manner in which his patient had been persecuted to the end. As soon as he could leave the bed, he carefully searched the room, and that next to it, and the passage, in hopes of clearing up the mystery of the unknown intruder; but he could find no trace of anyone. The whole house seemed still, as if conscious of what had fallen upon it; and, half hesitating a few moments, whether to summon assistance or not, Mowatt returned to the chamber of death.

Miss Joseph still slept heavily, but had changed her posture, and as her head drooped over the side of the chair, the Bramah key, which she had slung on a black ribbon round her neck, hung down so as to catch Mowatt's eye. He stopped short, and stood thinking.

Certainly, he could not boast of success in his mission; Dangerfield would scoff if he claimed a recompense beyond what his professional service might deserve; and he was in Dangerfield's power, and knew rather too much to be safe. Would it not be as well to gain something in the way of a family secret, that might enable him, at least, to bargain with more security? If at any time it were to be restored, it would be easy to lay the act on Justine; and he should take care to terrify her beforehand, on account of what she had already done. There was that shadow, too, to be accounted for—quite enough to prove that the poor lady was surrounded by those who might have robbed her.

"It is not robbery, only self-defence," he told his conscience, as his dexterous fingers untied the ribbon, secured the key, and opened the box. It contained very little besides the sealed packet, addressed to Miss Granard, which Mowatt carefully concealed, and then replaced the key, without disturbing the sleeper's repose.

We pass over her awakening, and the melancholy work of that morning, in which Mowatt displayed all the zeal and goodwill of a friend, taking every painful duty off Miss Joseph's hands, and only leaving her when (as he said) a message had come to summon him to attend a serious case at Liège.

That strange, sad morning had been a very happy one to another of our acquaintances. A great wish of Dr. Thaddeus' heart had been gratified by the safe arrival at his house of a live "specimen" for his museum, intended ultimately to be stuffed and labelled with others, but at present administering to the ends of science by causing terror and rage wherever it appeared; being a snake of deadly reputation, and a temper by no means improved by travelling. That an official document was in course of preparation at some of the rail-ways to demand penalties of such philosophers as chose to have dangerous beasts forwarded by public conveyances, mattered to our naturalist not at all; nor was he more touched by the yells of his own domestics, when, in the glee of his heart, he made them sharers of his satisfaction. Not one could be persuaded to lend a hand in conveying the precious box into the museum, till the gardener, summoned in haste, and stimulated by promises, brought a strong arm to work, and only muttered a few remonstrances under his breath. The sudden apparition, however, of a hissing head, full of all nature's fiercest enmity, was too much for even his courage, and he fled with a howl, louder than that of the womankind, leaving the philosopher to entertain his guest alone. How he contrived to do so was his own secret; enough that he was still engaged in the fascinating task of writing down every fact worth recording in his note-book, and keeping watch meanwhile on each movement of his valuable prisoner, when his bonne, after carefully reconnoitring the ground through the keyhole, informed him, at safe distance, that one of the English ladies must see him directly.

"English or Chinese," growled the naturalist, "it is enough that she is a woman, to make her come and interrupt me when I am most happy! Didn't you say I was busy?"

"I said I was not sure whether you were alive or dead, but in either case you would see mademoiselle, if possible."

"If possible! Since you are so prudent, show her in here. She won't stay long when she sees her natural enemy."

Somewhat appeased by his grim sarcasm, the Doctor returned to his note-book, and did not look round till actually compelled by civility. At the sight of Miss Joseph, who looked ten years older; he rose from his chair and pulled off his velvet cap, as one who had cause to complain of intrusion, but refrained from a sense of dignity.

"I am sorry to trouble you, Dr. Thaddeus," began his visitor, her voice scarcely audible from the dryness of her throat; "but —you have heard what has happened?"

"Mademoiselle, you may not have heard that, after perils and difficulties innumerable, my valuable specimen has reached me in excellent health and vigour: as you may see for yourself, if you are interested in natural history. Approach, but warily; for its habits, I confess, are as yet a matter of conjecture and analogy."

He motioned her courteously to the box, confident in the imme-

diate effect of the introduction ; but his visitor only glanced without appearing to see, mechanically asking, " Is it alive ? "

" Yes, indeed, dear lady ; and I may say, inconveniently so—for those who are afraid of sudden death. For my own poor part, look you (as your Hamlet says), when I have once put my small collection in order, it will be the same to me how I leave it."

She caught his arm with a gasping sigh, and dropped the word that touches every heart. His manner changed instantly ; he took her kindly by the hand.

" Is it so, indeed ? Then we should certainly be on the watch, that our matters may be in order ; for she was young enough to have laid my grey hairs in the grave."

" Old enough in trouble, Dr. Thaddeus. Yet she lived too long for their patience, and they hurried her out of the world at last : how, I shall never know."

She told her tale, filling up the gaps in her own evidence with that of Mr. Mowatt ; and ending with the discovery she had made since his departure, that the deposit commended to her care had vanished. He heard all with great attention ; questioned and cross-questioned her till tolerably satisfied that he knew all she could tell ; and sat caressing his chin, looking wistfully at his specimen.

" She would have been a valuable assistant, poor child, if I could have trained her. She has the rare gift of taming creatures ; a gift only vouchsafed to those who love them. Let her lady-guardian cherish it, for more depends on it than she knows. You have seen the lawyer, you say ? He is an honest man—you can trust all necessary matters to him ; but for the others —— Come in, there. What is it ? " as his gardener's head appeared at the door.

" Telegram just come, sir." He laid the document on the table, and vanished with suspicious alacrity. The naturalist opened the paper, and mused over it a few moments.

" My dear lady," he said to Miss Joseph, " I have not left my poor little pupil entirely to the care of strangers. A trusty friend has charge to keep an eye on the step-father whenever he is in Paris. Touching that missing packet, I have my own opinion, but it will require time to make it clear. With regard to the Professor, you say he was telegraphed to, at his Paris lodging ? "

" Mr. Mowatt telegraphed : also to England."

" Dangerfield started for England yesterday."

CHAPTER XII.

MISS WILMOT TAKES A LESSON.

"WHAT is the great news now, Dominie?" asked Sir Marcus, as Lewis Frankland, having shot past the window at the top of his speed, came in to breakfast, the last of the party, in a glow of exercise and animation. The weather, which had so severely tried the visitors at the Court when we saw them last, had changed considerably for the better; the sun was on the snowy head of Comberhoe, and the grass glittered like a sheet of diamonds with the frost.

"Great news, indeed!" said Lewis, and, with a comprehensive greeting round the table, he began at once to make up for lost time upon the good things before him. "Kit's Pond is as firm as this floor, and the air outside perfectly still—I never felt such a morning. If the ladies wish to skate, and want an admiring escort, the hour is come, and the man. Mrs. Bourne, Miss Medlicott, will you muffle yourselves up after breakfast, and take a look at the ice, even if you do not venture to cross it?"

"My dear Mr. Frankland," said Mrs. Bourne, before Miss Medlicott could do more than shiver, "I am sure you are very kind—I did go to Regent's Park once—you remember, Nicholas, my dear?—and they said people tried to drown themselves because of the hot brandy-and-water. So shocking, you know: one would rather give them a shilling to drink it at home. I could not bear to encourage anything so sad."

"I assure you, Mrs. Bourne, I never got drowned on anything stronger than barley-water; and that was in the Christmas holidays, more years ago than Miss Combermere or I choose to confess. She will bear me witness, for I believe she made it herself."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Bourne, "it is a very difficult thing to make properly. Poor dear Miss Medlicott never complains, but I know there was something wrong in hers last night, though I put two good glasses of sherry into it. So kind of you, Kate, my love, to send up the wine. I did wish Cecilia Wilmot would have tried——"

"Dear Mrs. Bourne," interrupted that young lady, "are you not aware that all those soothing beverages make me, who am sweetness-itself by nature, almost irritable? Nothing short of drowning would induce me to take them. And if Mr. Frankland is really going to perform on Kit's Pond, wherever that may be, I must ask if he takes pupils?"

"If any lady wishes for a coach, not to say a sledge, I am open to offers," laughed Lewis. "Archdale, shall you come to give us the benefit of your criticism?"

"No, thank you; I can imagine it all. I never could help pitying the shivering spectators on the bank."

"But here is Miss Wilmot going to take a lesson in the art; you will like to see how her natural genius can triumph over difficulties?"

"I have seen that so successfully done already, that I can believe it without looking on."

Cecilia bit her rosy lip. "Mr. Archdale is too merciful to laugh at an awkward beginner; but here is Miss Granard, who no doubt is a proficient in all that becomes a woman. Will she not be of the party?"

Adela Granard, confessed to having learned to skate abroad, but declined it for that morning; and Cecilia thought a look of intelligence passed between her and Ernest. Cecilia rose from the breakfast-table, declaring she must go and prepare for the worst; and, with the vague idea of solacing her own feelings by making somebody else uncomfortable, turned on poor Mrs. Bourne.

"If I should not return, ma'am, you will find my last wishes on my dressing-table."

"Oh, my dear, pray don't ——"

"Pray don't *you* trouble yourself about them, Mrs. Bourne," interposed Sir Marcus: "we know what they are—a figure of eight—with as many ciphers after it as possible. Is not that about the mark, Bourne, according to your experience?"

"According to my experience, a lady on the ice is sure to cut a pretty figure, whether she wishes it or not," growled that gentleman: and, under cover of the general laugh, Cecilia effected her escape.

When she reappeared, it was in the most becoming costume for the exercise that ingenuity could devise. Mrs. Archdale remarked that she did not look like a novice.

"I suspect you know a great deal more than you would have us believe," she said, with a kind smile that seemed to touch the young lady's heart. She pressed the widow's hand in hers, and whispered:

"If you knew more, you would wonder I had the courage to go anywhere." Then, without allowing time for an answer, she hurried on, calling to Lewis with a pretty impatience that brought him laughing to her side.

"I have been coaxing our hostess to lend you her pet skates, which she keeps locked up in chamois leather, and never wears."

"Will Kate not join us, then?" asked Cecilia, with an air of innocent surprise.

"Oh no! She has too much on her hands this morning to be thinking about her feet."

What this might mean, Miss Wilmot could not surmise; but she let it pass. Mr. Frankland seemed to be entirely absorbed in the object of their expedition, about which Cecilia professed a great deal more interest than was genuine. But this, unhappily, was nothing new in her career.

If her intention had been to pique Ernest's jealousy, to win a triumph over Kate, and to solace her own sore feelings all at once, by fascinating Lewis Frankland, she soon found that nothing short or

being in earnest would keep up her credit in the latter's eyes ; and that if she came out to learn skating, it was no use dawdling about to talk of other things. She might be a little cowardly, and that only made him more kind and encouraging ; but indifference to improvement would very soon have sent him home again.

Kit's Pond being a favourite resort of the neighbourhood, though actually Sir Marcus's property, was too public for tuition, and Cecilia was conducted to a retired part of the grounds, where a small shallow pool presented as safe a surface as could well be desired. Mr. Frankland was unwearied in his patience and good-humour ; but he was evidently so much more bent upon making her learn than in admiring her graceful awkwardness, that she was obliged to take pains and mind what she was about, and this became intolerable in her irritated state of mind. She was fain, at last, to plead fatigue, and proposed walking on to Kit's Pond, that she might see some real skating, and try and learn by looking on. A brisk walk would do her good ; she was getting thoroughly chilled.

He slung her skates with his own across his shoulder, and reproached himself for forgetting she was not hardened to northern cold as he was.

" Ah ! " she said, as they went through the silent woods, the dry leaves, made beautiful with sparkling silver, crackling and rustling at every step, and the air so pure and fresh that every breath you drew seemed another moment added to your life instead of taken away— " if you had only kept your word, and made me an Esquimaux hut in the snow, I should have been acclimatised by this time, and have done you more credit."

" When the snow was only deep enough to bury you, what could I do ? "

" Pure invention to cover idleness, Mr. Frankland ! I know all you would have had to do. Just dig so many feet downwards, and so many horizontally, throwing out the snow with your spade—smooth the roof with your head—line it all with skins—make your wife light the lamp, and keep the pot boiling—and there you are ! "

" There I am not, by any means : having no wife to keep the pot boiling, and nothing for her to boil if I had."

" And no friends in the tribe to keep you from starving ? "

" Better friends could not be. But, except in the holidays, I have a fancy the bread you earn is sweeter than the cake that is given you. Especially if you want to share it with somebody else."

" I admire your spirit, though such independence is rare. Then are you actually digging out your house after all by sheer labour—looking forward as a reward to the dignity of the lamp and kettle ? It must give an interest to your life which others might envy you," added Cecilia.

He looked at her as if to see if she were in earnest. " *You* cannot want interest in yours—so bright and pleasant as it must be ? "

"Oh, *mine!* I was not thinking of myself," she returned, with an emphasis which he might interpret as he pleased. "I could not help feeling how much better your friend Mr. Archdale would be for some stimulus of the kind, to shake him out of his invalid ways."

"He has had shaking enough, poor fellow, if that would do it. I am afraid he will have to give up the army."

"What, in consequence of his accident?"

"I fancy so. Sir Marcus is no croaker, but I see he has strong doubts of his being again fit for active service: and Archdale is not a fellow to shirk duty, if it has to be done. I wish he would take to my line—I should like nothing better than to have him for a colleague."

"But, if he does retire he need not work for a living?"

"If he wants to set up a kettle and lamp he must, I suppose."

Another turn brought them to the smooth sheet of ice which bore the name of Kit's Pond, though no antiquarian had ever satisfactorily answered the query who Kit was. It wound in and out the wooded banks, and the point they had reached, being the farthest from the town, seemed sufficiently solitary for the most nervous of beginners. Cecilia, however, resisted all persuasion—only urged her companion to give her the best lesson possible by showing how the thing ought to be done.

"I shall walk along the bank, and admire you with comfort," she said. "Unless I am comfortable I never admire anybody or anything."

He was reluctant to leave her alone, which she laughed at, and he was soon darting along the polished surface with a skill rarely equalled. Miss Wilmot had no attention to give him. Her eyes were blinded with tears; her heart was throbbing with anger and sorrow. How was it that Ernest Archdale, once lightly prized, had seated himself so firmly on her bosom's throne that all his own coldness, and all her womanly pride, could not overthrow it? If she had, indeed, injured his prospects and ruined his health, why did this make her long to win back the power of compensation, and through forgiveness regain the devotion she had thrown away? What did Lewis Frankland mean by that last hint? Was it true, what her own misgivings had told her, that not only was she rejected, but another already preferred? She would not, could not believe it; and Lewis's own peace should be thrown into the scale before the point was yielded—peace of which he seemed so careless, that it was just possible he was unaware of its being in danger. She had turned to watch his progress, and wave a sympathising hand, when the cracking of dried sticks behind her was followed by a voice, respectfully asking if she had not dropped her veil.

The speaker was a well-made stranger, buttoned up to the throat in a coat lined with handsome fur, which turned over the collar and cuffs. The veil, which he offered with a polite bow, had fallen unnoticed from her hat. She accepted it with thanks: and, while a

few words were exchanged about the beauty of the morning, she could not help imagining she had seen the face before. The deep, though guarded admiration which he threw into his eyes, as they met hers, almost daunted her. He seemed to read the unspoken question, and replied to it with a smile—that though he had the honour of knowing Miss Wilmot by sight, he could not expect her to know him.

“Since you know my name, then,” said she, blushing, but more curious than displeased, “may I ask yours?”

“My name,” he said, “may not be quite strange to you. It is Dangerfield.”

Cecilia started. The Professor—of whose séances and mysterious powers people spoke so much—could this be the same man? He bowed, but asked with a gravity that impressed her more than she liked to acknowledge, what she might have heard of his powers.

“Oh, that you can call spirits from the vasty deep, and that they come when you call them, and so forth,” was the light reply.

“Take care,” he said, quietly: “it is not always necessary to call those who are so near.”

The eyes which had glowed a minute before were now fixed upon her with a keenness that, with all her high spirit, sent a shiver through her veins. She looked hurriedly round for Lewis.

“Mr. Frankland is busy at this moment, helping a boy who has slipped down,” said her strange companion; and his voice, though perfectly courteous, seemed to have assumed somewhat of authority. “It was not of him that Miss Wilmot was thinking when she threw back the veil that hid a face for which men have risked life and limb.”

“What *do* you mean, Professor Dangerfield?”

She knew what he meant too well; but in the strange alarm that was gaining upon her, she hardly heeded what she said. Without noticing the question, he continued to look at her steadily: just as a philosopher might contemplate a new mineral he was desirous to analyse.

“When and where I have seen Miss Wilmot,” he said, “matter little at present. That I know more of her than she imagines, I could prove, if she had the courage to desire it.”

She tried to laugh. “I shall begin to think you are really a soothsayer, Mr. Dangerfield, and that you want to try my nerves. But this should be done in the witching hour of night: or, at least, in a well darkened room, if you wish me to become a believer.”

He “held her with his glittering eye:” and for the first time in her life she understood the meaning of the line.

“Shall I tell you?” he asked, and his voice seemed to thrill through every nerve. Half-frightened, half angry, she petulantly replied that he could do as he pleased—there was nothing for him to tell that she knew of.

His answer was not a very long one. It was given in a whisper, and it sent the passionate blood surging to her brow.

"Who dares to say so? Who can be so wicked as to tell such untruths. Let me pass, sir! I am going home—Mr. Frankland will follow me directly."

The Professor lifted his hat again, and drew back for her to pass. Before she had gone many yards, however, she found her strange acquaintance by her side.

"I think, sir," she said, with all the dignity at her command, "you did not understand that I wish to be alone."

"You are *not* alone," was his answer. "That is why I am here."

The luncheon was on the table, and Mrs. Bourne and Miss Medlicott were in the dining-room, waiting for Kate Combermere; who, strange to say, was unpunctual and came in from a walk, rather breathless with haste, just as Cecilia reached the house.

"Oh, come," said Miss Combermere, to her as they entered together, "I am not the last, at any rate. Where is Lewis?"

"I left him on the ice—I was cold and tired," answered Cecilia.

"You look quite starved. I begin to think Mrs. Bourne is right: that skating means hot brandy-and-water. You have not been drowning, I hope, to earn it?"

"I am not sure; I have been in another world, I think—but not a better one. Does it ever seem to you that everybody is going mad?"

A vague suspicion crossed Kate's mind that this referred to Lewis. It seemed so unlike him to have allowed her to walk home alone!

"To tell you the truth, Miss Wilmot, I fear we shall find a few symptoms of madness in the dining-room if we keep our friends waiting longer. A little hot soup and a glass of port wine will bring back your colour; but Lewis will not hear the last of this for many a day."

"Indeed, it was no fault of his—I am not used to this climate. And that reminds me—Paul!" as the boy was passing to the offices, "I dropped my shawl somewhere near the large beech-tree, and I am afraid of its being spoiled. Would you run and find it for me?"

"Certainly, ma'am," said Paul, delighted to have a scamper across the grass, and away he went. Kate hurried her shivering guest into the dining-room, and plied her with restoratives.

She could not help observing how subdued the young lady appeared, and with what apparent meekness she endured all the kind scolding, and offers of remedies, showered upon her by Mrs. Bourne. Something must have happened to produce such an effect on her temperament; and until Lewis came back, Kate could not be easy. One look, one word from him would be enough, but that she must have. It seemed, too, that Cecilia was on the listen, starting every time the door opened, and hardly attending sufficiently to any question

to give an appropriate answer. The luncheon was nearly over when she volunteered a remark that it was a day of general unpunctuality, for Miss Granard and Emily had not yet appeared.

"Don't you know, then——" began Mr. Bourne, but stopped short, seeing her eyes wander as the door opened and Paul entered, carrying her shawl in his hand. The boy's face was flushed, and in passing his master's chair, he dropped a whisper in his ear. Cecilia saw a fierce light kindle in the young officer's eye, as he looked up enquiringly and exchanged a glance with Sir Marcus. Her heart beat so fast she could hardly breathe. Sir Marcus, turning quietly to Mrs. Bourne, asked if she would take anything more, and on her declining, laid down his knife and fork, pushed back his chair, and spoke.

"Archdale, I want you for one moment, and your boy too. Don't wait for Lewis, Kate; Stephens will look after him. The ladies will be warmer in the drawing-room."

Kate, who knew the meaning of every tone of her father's voice, obeyed the implied order at once. She was certain he had a reason, and that was enough; the next thing was to prevent other people from finding it out. As they passed on to the drawing-room, she offered her arm to Cecilia, and was dismayed to find her trembling from head to foot. The vague doubt Kate had felt before returned, and with it a sudden pang of terror that something had happened which she was not to know.

"Tell me," she said, in a choked whisper, as they stood a moment in the doorway, "are you hiding any misery from me? It may be meant as kindness, but I call it cruel. Whatever it is, tell it me at once."

The door-bell rang; Cecilia clung tighter to her arm. When the hold relaxed, Miss Combermere had only time to place her on the sofa before she fainted.

Mrs. Archdale came to Kate's assistance. "Go and call your father, my dear; I can attend to her. Poor, sweet girl! She has had some shock to her nerves. You were quite right, Mrs. Bourne, in your advice: but you had better attend to Miss Medlicott; she looks quite frightened, and we shall have her fainting too."

Kate went in quest of Sir Marcus, and met Ernest Archdale in the hall. He stopped her from going further.

"I only want my father," she cried, impatiently; "you are all so full of mystery, I am nearly at my wits' end. I know you are keeping something from me—what is it?"

"Nothing is kept from *you*, Miss Combermere. But," dropping his voice, "you were only just in time. That man is here."

"*Here*? And you have let him in?"

"Paul brought word that he was coming, and he has been shown into Sir Marcus's study. We can safely trust him there."

Kate drew a long breath. "What can be his object in coming here?"

"No doubt to persuade that poor child to go back with him. Miss Granard ought to be warned directly."

"And here comes one who will do it; only he must have something to eat first," said Kate, joyfully, as Lewis Frankland came in through the offices. She would not for the world have confessed now what her alarm had been, so she only scolded him for forsaking Miss Wilmot, who had come back dead tired, and since luncheon had fainted away. How Ernest received this news she had not time to notice, but Lewis threw a new light on the subject: he had seen Miss Wilmot talking with a stranger, who seemed to follow her home. They began discussing what this could mean.

Sir Marcus received his visitor civilly, but with more formal politeness than he usually showed a guest. He held in his hand the card which the Professor had sent in, and, bowing rather stiffly, begged to be informed in what manner he could serve him.

Cosmo Dangerfield, returning the bow with interest, apologised in set phrases for intruding on Sir Marcus Combermere; but his business was urgent and painful; so urgent, so painful, that he could only throw himself on that gentleman's goodness. To this, Sir Marcus replied by another bow, but neither offered him a chair, nor the slightest assistance in bringing out his errand.

"I am correct, Sir Marcus, am I not, in assuming that one peculiarly dear to me is at this moment a guest under your roof?"

"I have several friends with me at present, sir. To which of them are you so strongly attached?"

"Nay, Sir Marcus, nay! Even professional reserve—often so valuable—can scarcely be maintained here, when you must know that I allude to my wife's only child—the child, sir, of a dying mother, who cannot die in peace without seeing her again. I have yielded to my wife's prayers and entreaties, and left her, ill as she is, taking this journey, that I, at least, may have nothing to reproach myself with."

"And you imagine, sir, that in taking such a journey you escape self-reproach? I have my own opinion on that point, which may be of small importance to you: but I must inform you that you lie under a mistake. Miss Stormount, is not in my house."

"Excuse me, Sir Marcus: I respect your motives; but you cannot expect me to admit this without a word of remonstrance. My duty to a dying wife emboldens me to press your conscience. As a father and as a man whose character stands so high—"

"As a father, and as an honest man, sir, I am accustomed to speak the truth. Permit me to observe that I am not accustomed, especially in my own house, to have my word doubted. Your motive for coming to fetch your step-daughter rests with yourself: the essential thing for you to know is that she is *not* here."

"Most extraordinary!" cried the crafty Professor. "She was here this morning—that I know for certain."

"Whatever you know for certain must be quite satisfactory to you."

"You admit that she was here?"

"If you are certain of the fact, I do not see what more is required."

"Will you tell me where she is—as the honest man you claim to be?"

"I should scarcely be honest if I did. I am not authorised to give her address to anybody."

"Nor Miss Granard's? You will not help me to fulfil a dying woman's wishes?"

"Excuse me—I am fully determined that they shall be fulfilled, if my help can avail to do it. The child was brought to England by her mother's desire, and, as far as I can judge, not an hour too soon. Your system of philosophy, sir, is not exactly adapted for sensitive girls."

"You convict yourself, Sir Marcus! You own to having had her case in your hands."

"Exactly so—I have had it. And it has given me satisfactory reasons for declining any further communication with you."

"I shall learn what I want to know, Sir Marcus, in spite of your discretion; in spite of all, I saw this room—believe it or not, as you please—when I was on the other side of the sea. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in *your* philosophy, however you may scoff at *mine*."

"There is so little of heaven in yours, sir, that it is scarcely worth mentioning. You will do as you please about obtaining the knowledge you want; I object to your selecting my house as the means."

"Then I will believe you at once, and beg you to accept my apologies for taking up your valuable time."

"My time, sir, could not be better employed. Stephens!"

The butler appeared instantly, and the visitor was bowed out of study and hall—and the door bolted behind him.

"Now, Paul, my lad!" said Sir Marcus, as the boy sprang up from the corner in which he had been concealed. "After him like a beagle, and let us know where he goes."

(To be continued.)



LADY JENKINS.

TOD arrived at Lefford. I met him at the train, just as I had met Miss Cattledon—who was with us still. As we walked out of the station together, many a man cast a glance after the tall, fine young fellow—who looked strong enough to move the world; if, like Archimedes, the famous geometrician of Syracuse, he had but possessed the necessary lever.

“Shall you be able to stay a week, Tod?”

“Two weeks if they’d like it, Johnny. How you have picked up, lad!”

“Picked up?”

“In looks. They are all your own again. Glad to see it, old fellow.”

Some few days had elapsed since the latest event recorded in this veritable little history—the call that Major Leckie made on Captain Collinson, and found his brother there instead of himself—but no change worth noting to the reader had occurred in the town’s politics. Lady Jenkins was ailing as much as ever, and Madame St. Vincent was keeping a sharp watch on the maid, Lettice Lane, without, as yet, detecting her in any evil practices: the soirées were numerous, one being held at some house or another every night in the work-a-day week: and the engagement of Captain Collinson to Miss Belmont was now talked of as an assured fact. Collinson himself had been away from Lefford during these intervening days. Pink, the hair-dresser, thought he had taken a run up to London, on some little matter of business. As to the brother, we had heard no more of him.

But, if Captain Collinson had taken a run up to London, he had unquestionably run down again, though not to Lefford. On the day but one previous to the coming of Tod, Janet and Miss Cattledon went over by train to do some shopping at the county town, which stood fifteen miles from Lefford, I being with them. Turning into a pastrycook’s in the middle of the day to get something to eat, we turned in upon Captain Collinson. He sat at the white marble-topped table in the corner of the shop, eating an oyster patty.

“We heard you were in London,” said Janet, shaking hands with him, as he rose to offer his seat.

“Got back this morning. Shall be at Lefford to-morrow: perhaps to-night,” he answered.

He stood gobbling up his patty quickly. I said something to him, just because the recollection came into my mind, about the visit of his brother.

“My brother!” he exclaimed in answer, staring at me with all his

eyes. "What brother? How do you know anything about my brother?"

"Major Leckie saw him when he called upon you. Saw him instead of you. You had gone to Toome. We took it to be your brother, from the description; he was so like yourself."

The captain smiled. "I forgot that," he said. "We *are* much alike. Ned told me of Leckie's call. A pity I could not see him! Things always happen cross and contrary. Has Leckie left Fox-grove yet?"

"Oh, he left it that same night. I should think he is on his way back to India by this."

"His visit to Lefford seems to have been as flying a one as my brother's was, and *his* did not last a day. How much?"—to the girl behind the counter. "Sixpence? There it is." And, with a general adieu nodded to the rest of us, the captain left the shop.

"I don't like that dandy," spoke Cattledon, in her severest tone. "There's something about him not *true*."

I answered nothing: but I had for a little time now thought the same. And, it may as well be mentioned that Captain Collinson got back to Lefford that same evening, in time to make his appearance at Mrs. Parker's soirée, at which both Miss Belmont and Mina Knox were present.

So now we come to Tod again, and to the day of his arrival. Talking of one thing and another, telling him this and that of the native politics, as we all like to do when a stranger comes to set himself down, however temporarily, amidst us, I mentioned the *familiarity* that in two of the people struck upon my memory. Never did I see this same Captain Collinson, never did I see Madame St. Vincent, or hear them speak, or listen to their laugh, but the feeling that I had met them before—been, so to say, intimate with both one and the other—came forcibly upon me.

"And yet it would seem, upon the face of things, that I never have," I continued to Tod, when telling of this. "Mme. St. Vincent says she never left the South of France until last year; and the captain had been nearly all his life in India."

"You know you do take fancies, Johnny."

"True. But, do not the fancies generally get borne out by the result? Anyway, they both puzzle me: and there's a ring in their voices that —"

"A ring in their voices!" put in Tod, laughing.

"Say an accent, then: and it sounds, to my ears, unmistakably Worcestershire."

"Johnny, you *are* fanciful!"

I never got anything better from Tod. "You will have the honour of meeting them both here to-night," I said to him, "for it is Janet's turn to give the soirée, and I know they are expected."

Evening came. At six o'clock the first instalment of the guests

knocked at the door; by half-past six the soirée was in full glory: a regular crowd. Everyone seemed to have come, with the exception of the ladies from Jenkins House. Sam Jenkins brought in their excuses.

Sam had run up to Jenkins House with some physic for the butler, who said he had got a surfeit (from drinking too much old ale, Tamlyn thought), and Sam had made use of the opportunity to ask to see his aunt. Madame St. Vincent objected. It would try the dear old lady too much, madame said. She was lying in a sweet sleep on the sofa in her own room; had been quite blithe and lively all day, but was drowsy now; and she had better not be disturbed until bed-time. Perhaps Mr. Sam would kindly make their excuses to Mrs. Arnold Knox.

"Can't you come yourself, madame?" asked Sam, politely. "If Aunt Jenkins is asleep, and means to stay asleep till bed-time, she can't want you."

"I could not think of leaving her, dear Mr. Sam," objected madame. "She looks for me the moment she wakes."

So, Sam, I say, brought back the message. Putting himself into his evening coat as speedily as might be, he came into the room while the tea was going on, and delivered it to Janet as distinctly as the clatter of cups and saucers allowed. You should have seen Cattledon that evening!—in a grey silk gown that stood on end, a gold necklace, and dancing shoes.

"This is the second soirée this week that Lady Jenkins has failed to appear at," spoke Mrs. Knox—not Janet—in a resentful tone. "My firm opinion is, that Mme. St. Vincent keeps her away."

"Keeps her away!" cried Arnold. "Why should she do that?"

"Well, yes; gives way to her fads and fancies about being ill, instead of rousing her out of them. As to *why* she does it," continued Mrs. Knox, "I suppose she is beginning to grow nervous about her. As if an innocent quiet soirée could hurt Lady Jenkins!"

"Johnny," whispered Sam, subsiding into the background after delivering his message, "may I never stir again if I didn't see Collinson hiding in aunt's garden!"

"Hiding in your aunt's garden! What was he doing that for?"

"Goodness knows. Did you ever notice a big bay-tree that you pass on the left, between the door and the gate? Well, he was standing behind it. I came out of the house at a double quick pace, knowing I should be late for the soirée, cleared the steps at a leap, and the path to the gate at another. Too quick I suppose for Collinson. He was bending forward to look at the parlour windows, and drew back as I passed."

"Did you speak?"

"No, I came flying on, taking no notice. I daresay he thinks I did not see him. One does not like, you know, to speak to a man who evidently wants to avoid you. But now—I wonder what he

was doing there? Watching Mme. St. Vincent, I should say, through the lace curtains."

To my mind this sounded curious. But that Mina Knox was before my eyes—just at the moment listening to the whispers of Dan Jenkins—I should have thought the captain was looking after her. Or, rather, *not* listening. Mina had a pained, restless look on her face, not in the least natural to it, and kept her head turned away. And the more Dan whispered, the more she turned it from him.

"Here he is, Sam."

Sam looked round at my words, and saw Captain Collinson, then coming in. He was got up to perfection as usual, and wore a white rose in his button-hole. His purple-black hair, beard, whiskers, and moustache were grand; his voice had its ordinary fashionable drawl. I saw Tod—at the opposite side of the room—cease talking with old Tamlyn, to fix his keen eyes on the captain.

"Very sorry to be so late," apologised the captain, bowing over Janet's hand. "Been detained at home writing letters for India. Overland mail goes out to-morrow night."

Sam gave me a knock with his elbow. "What a confounded story!" he whispered. "Wonder what the gallant captain means, Johnny! Wonder what game he is up to?"

It was, I daresay, nearly an hour after this that I came across Tod. He was standing against the wall, laughing slightly to himself, evidently in some glee. Captain Collinson was at the piano opposite, his back to us, turning over the leaves for Caroline Parker, who was singing.

"What are you amused at, Tod?"

"At you, lad. Thinking what a muff you are."

"I always am a muff, I know. But why am I one just now in particular?"

"For not knowing that man," nodding towards Collinson. "I thought I recognised him as he came in; felt sure of him when I heard him speak. Men may disguise their faces almost at will; but not their voices, Johnny."

"Why, who is he?" I asked in surprise.

"I'll tell you when we are alone. I should have known him had we met amid the Hottentots. I thought he was over in Australia; knew he went there."

"But—is he not Captain Collinson?"

Tod laughed. "Just as much as I am, Johnny. Of course he may have assumed the name of Collinson in place of his own: if so, nobody has a right, I take it, to say him nay. But, as to his being a captain in the Bengal cavalry—well, I don't think he is."

"And you say I know him!"

"I say you ought to—but for being a muff. I suppose it is the mass of hair he is adorned with that has thrown you off the scent."

"But, where have I seen him, Tod? Who ——"
"Hush, lad. We may be overheard."

As a general rule, all the guests at these soirées left together. They did so to-night. The last to file out at the door were the Hampshires, with Mrs. Knox, her daughter, and Miss Mack—for Janet had made a point of inviting poor hard-worked, put-upon Macky. Both families lived in the London Road, and would go home in company. Dan had meant to escort Mina, but she pointedly told him he was not wanted, and took the offered arm of Captain Collinson. Upon which, Dan turned back in a huff. Sam laughed at that, and ran after them himself.

How long a time had elapsed afterwards, I hardly know. Perhaps half an hour; perhaps not so much. We had not parted for the night: in fact, Mr. Tamlyn and Tod were still over the game at chess they had begun since supper; which game seemed not in a mood to be finished; I watched it; Dr. Knox and Miss Cattledon stood talking over the fire; while Janet, ever an active housekeeper, was in the supper-room, helping the maids to clear the table. In the midst of this, Charlotte Knox came back, rushing in in a state of intense excitement, with the news that Mina and Captain Collinson were eloping together.

The account she gave was this—though just at first nothing clear could be made out of her. Upon starting, the Hampshires, Mrs. Knox, and Miss Mack, went on in front; Captain Collinson and Mina walked next, and Charlotte fell behind with Sam. Fell very much behind, as it appeared; for when people are talking of what interests them, their steps are apt to linger; and Sam was telling her of having seen Captain Collinson behind the bay-tree. It was a beautiful night, warm and pleasant.

Charlotte and Sam let the captain and Mina get pretty nearly the length of a street before them; and *they*, in their turn, were as much behind the party in advance. Suddenly Sam exclaimed that the captain was taking the wrong way. His good eyes had discerned that, instead of keeping straight on, which was the proper (and only) route to the London Road, he and Mina had turned down the lane leading to the railway station. "Halloo!" he exclaimed to Charlotte, "what's that for?" "They must be dreaming," was Charlotte's laughing reply. "Perhaps the captain wants to take an excursion by a night train?" Whether anything in the last remark, spoken in jest, struck particularly on the mind of Sam, Charlotte did not know: away he started as if he had been shot, Charlotte running after him. Arrived at the lane, Sam saw the other two flying along it, just as if they wanted to catch an engine and had not a minute to do it in. Onward went Sam's long legs in pursuit; but the captain's legs were long also, and he was pulling Mina with him: altogether Sam did not gain much upon them. The half-past eleven o'clock train was then gliding into the station,

where it was timed to halt two minutes. The captain and Mina dashed in; and, when Sam got up, he was putting her into the nearest carriage. Such was Charlotte's statement: and her eyes looked wild, and her breath came in gasps as she made it.

"Have they *gone*?—gone on by the train?" questioned Dr. Knox, who seemed unnaturally calm.

"Goodness, no!" panted the excited Charlotte. "Sam managed to get his arm round Mina's waist, and the captain could not pull her away from him. It was a regular struggle on the platform, Arnold: I was afraid they'd pull her in two. I appealed to the station-master, who stood by, telling him it was my sister, and that she was being kidnapped against her will, and Sam also appealed to him. So he gave the signal when the time was up, and let the train go on."

"Not against her will, I fear," spoke Arnold Knox from between his condemning lips. "Where are they now, Lotty?"

"On the platform, quarrelling; and still struggling which shall keep possession of Mina. I came running here to fetch you, Arnold, and I believe I shall never get my breath back again."

With one accord we all, Cattledon excepted, set off to the station; even old Tamlyn proved he had some go in his legs yet. Tod reached it first: few young men could come up to him at running.

Sam Jenkins had exchanged his hold of Mina for a hold on Captain Collinson. The two were struggling together; but Sam's grasp was firm, and he held him as in a vice. "No, no," he was saying, "you don't escape me, captain, until somebody comes here to take charge of Mina." As to Mina, little simpleton, she cowered in the shade of the corner, shivering and crying. The station-master and the two night porters stood about, gaping and staring.

Tod put his hand on the Captain's shoulder; his other hand momentarily holding back Dr. Knox. "Since when have you been Captain Collinson?" he quietly asked.

The captain turned his angry eyes upon him. "What is that to you?" he retorted. "I am Captain Collinson; that is enough for you."

"Enough for me, and welcome. Not enough, as I judge, for this gentleman here," indicating the doctor. "When I knew you your name was not Collinson."

"How dare you insult me?" hissed the Captain. "My name not Collinson!"

"Not at all," was Tod's equable answer. "It was FABIAN PELL."

II.

THERE are times, even to this day, when it seems to me that I must have been a muff, as Tod said, not to know him. But, some years had elapsed since I saw him; and those years, with their ill-fortune and exposure, and the hard life he had led in Australia, had

served to change him greatly ; above all, there was now the dis-
guising mass of hair hiding the greater part of his face. Bit by bit
my recollection came to me, and I knew that he was, beyond all
shadow of doubt, Fabian Pell.

How long we sat up that night at Mr. Tamlyn's, talking over its
events, I cannot precisely tell. For quite the half of what was left
of it. Mina, brought to his own home by Arnold for safety, was
consigned to Cattledon's charge and bed, and retired to the latter in
a state of humiliation and collapse.

The scene on the platform had soon come to a conclusion. With
the security of Mina assured by the presence of her brother and the
rest of us, Sam let go his hold of the captain. It had been a nice
little plot this, that the captain had set afoot in secret, and per-
suaded that silly girl, not much better than a child, to accede to.
They were to have run away to London that night, and been
married there the next day ; the captain, as was found out later,
having already managed to procure a licence. How he would have
braved the matter out to Dr. Knox that night, and excused himself,
he best knew. Tod applied the checkmate by proclaiming him as
Fabian Pell. A lame attempt at denial, which Tod, secure in his
assertion, laughed at ; a little poor bravado, and Captain Collinson
collapsed. Against the truth—that he was Fabian Pell—brought
home to him so suddenly and clearly, he could not hold out ; the
man's hardihood deserted him ; and he turned tail and went off the
platform, calling back that Mr. Todhetley should hear from him in
the morning.

We came away then, bringing Mina. Sam went to escort Charlotte
home, where they would have the pleasure of imparting the news to
Mrs. Knox, who probably by that time was thinking that Lotty had
eloped as well as Mina. And now we were sitting round the fire in
old Tamlyn's room, discussing what had happened. Sam came back
in the midst of it. Arnold *was* down in the mouth, and no mistake.

"Did you see Mrs. Knox ?" he asked of Sam.

"Not to speak to, sir. I saw her through the kitchen window.
She was spreading bread-and-jam for Dicky, who had come down in
his night-gown and would not be coaxed back to bed."

"What an injudicious woman she is!" put in old Tamlyn.
"Enough to ruin the boy."

Perhaps Dr. Knox was thinking, as he sat there, his hand pressed
upon his brow, that if she had been a less injudicious woman, a
different mother altogether, Mina might not have been in danger of
falling into the present escapade : but he said nothing.

"I remember hearing of the notorious break-up of the Clement-
Pells at the time it took place," observed old Tamlyn to Tod.
"And to think that this man should be one of them!"

"He must carry his impudence about with him," was Tod's
remark.

"They ruined hundreds, if not thousands," continued old Tamlyn. "I conclude your people knew all about it?"

"Indeed; yes. We were in the midst of it. My father lost—how much was it, Johnny?"

"Two hundred pounds," I answered; the question bringing vividly back to me our adventures in Boulogne, when the Pater and Mr. Brandon went over there to try to get the money back.

"I suppose," resumed the surgeon, "your father had that much balance lying in their hands, and lost it all?"

"No," said Tod, "he did not bank with them. A day or two before Clement-Pell burst up, he drove to our house as bold as brass, asking my father in the most off-hand manner to let him have a cheque for two hundred pounds until the next day. The Squire did let him have it, without scruple, and of course lost it. He would have let him have two thousand had Pell asked for it."

"But that was a fraud. Pell might have been punished for it."

"I don't know that it was so much of a fraud as many other things Pell did, and might have been punished for," observed Tod. "At any rate, not as great a one. He escaped out of the way, as I daresay you know, sir, and his family escaped with him. It was hard on them. They had been brought up in the greatest possible extravagance, in all kinds of luxury. This one, Fabian, was in the army. He, of course, had to retire. His own debts would have forced that step upon him, apart from the family disgrace."

"Did he re-enter it, I wonder?"

Tod laughed. "I should say not. He went to Australia. Not above a year ago I heard that he was still there. He must have come back here fortune-hunting; *bread*-hunting; and passed himself off as Captain Collinson the better to do it. Miss Mina Knox's sum of seven thousand pounds was a good prize to fight for."

"That's it!" cried Sam. "Dan has said all along it was the money he was after, dishonourable wretch, not Mina herself. He cares too much for Mme. St. Vincent to care for Mina. How did he get the funds, I wonder, that he has been flourishing about upon?"

"Won them at billiards," suggested Tod.

"No," said Sam, "I don't think that. By all accounts he lost more than he won in the billiard-rooms."

Dr. Knox looked up from a reverie. "Was it himself that Major Leckie saw?—and did he pass himself off as another man to escape detection? Did he go off for the remainder of the week lest the major should look him up again?"

And we knew it must have been so.

Little sleep did I get that night, or rather, morning, for the smaller hours had struck when we went to bed. The association of ideas is a great thing in this world; a help in many a difficult emergency. This association led me from Fabian Pell to his sisters: and the mysterious memory of Mme. St. Vincent that had so puzzled

my mind cleared itself up. As though a veil had been withdrawn from before my eyes, leaving the recollection unclouded and distinct, I saw she was one of those sisters: the eldest of them, Martha Jane. And, let not the reader call me a muff, as Tod again did later, for not having found her out before. When I knew her she was an angular, raw-boned girl, with rather a haggard and very pale face, and nothing to say for herself. Now she was a filled-out woman, her face rounder, her colour healthy, and one of the most talkative and self-possessed I ever listened to. In the old days her hair was reddish and fell in curls: now it was dark, and worn in braids and plaits fashionably incomprehensible. Whether the intervening years had darkened the hair, or whether madame cunningly dyed it, must remain a question.

Dan Jenkins and his brother were right. They no doubt had seen looks of anxious interest given to Mme. St. Vincent by Captain Collinson. Not as a lover, however; they were mistaken there; but as a brother who was living in a state of peril, and whom she was doubtless protecting and trying to aid. But how far had her aid gone? That she kept up the ball, as to his being Captain Collinson, the rich, and honourable, and well-connected Indian officer, went without telling, as the French say; and no one could expect her to proclaim him as Fabian Pell, the swindler; but had she been helping him in his schemes upon Mina? Her display of formal coolness to him must have been put on to mislead the public.

And what was I to do? Must I quietly bury my discovery within me and say nothing? or must I tell Dr. Knox that Madame St. Vincent was no other than Martha Jane Pell? What *ought* I to do? It was that question that kept me awake. Never liking to do harm where I could not do good, I asked myself whether I had any right to ruin her. It might be that she was not able to help herself; that she had done no worse than keep Fabian's secret: it might be that she had wanted him gone just as much as Dan Jenkins had wanted it.

"I'll tell Tod in the morning," was my final conclusion, "and hear what he thinks."

When I got downstairs they were beginning breakfast, and Miss Cattledon was turning from the table to carry up Mina's tea. Mina remained in the depths of tears and contrition, and Cattledon had graciously told her she might lie in bed. Breakfast was taken very late that morning, the result of the previous night's disturbance, and the clock was striking ten when we rose from it.

"Tod, I want to speak to you," I said in his ear. "I want to tell you something."

"All right, lad. Tell away."

"Not here. Won't you come out with me somewhere? We must be alone."

"Then it must wait, Johnny. I am going round to the stables with Tamlyn. He wishes me to see the horse they have got on

trial. By the description, I don't think much of him : should give him a pretty long trial before I bought him."

They went out. Not long after that, I was strolling across the courtyard with Sam Jenkins, who had been despatched on some professional errand, when we saw Sir Henry Westmoreland ride up and rein in his horse. He asked for Dr. Knox. Sam went back to say so, while Sir Henry talked to me.

"Look here," said Sir Henry to the doctor, after they had shaken hands, "I have had a curious letter from Major Leckie this morning. At least"—taking the letter from his pocket and opening it—"it contains an odd bit of news. He says—where is it?—stand still, sir,"—to the horse. "Here it is; just listen, doctor. 'Dr. Knox must have made a mistake in saying Collinson was at Lefford. Collinson is in India; has not been home at all. I have had a letter from him by the overland mail just in, asking me to do a commission for him. Tell Dr. Knox this. If the man he spoke of is passing himself off for Collinson of ours, he must be an impostor.' What do you think of that, doctor?" concluded Sir Henry, folding the letter again.

"He is an impostor," replied Dr. Knox. "We found him out last night."

"What a rogue! Has he been taking people in—been fleecing them?"

"He has taken us all in, Sir Henry, in one sense of the word; he was on the point of doing it more effectually, when he was stopped. As to fleecing people, I don't know about that. He seems to have had plenty of money at his command—whence obtained is another question."

"Cheated somebody out of it; rely upon that," remarked the baronet, as he nodded a good day to us, and rode off.

Mina was downstairs when we returned indoors. Anything more pitiful than her state of contrition and distress I should not care to see. No doubt the discovery, just made, tended to enhance her repentance. In a silly girl's mind some romance might attach to the notion of an elopement with a gallant captain of consideration, brave in Her Majesty's service; but to elope with Mr. Fabian Pell, the chevalier d'industrie, was quite another affair. Mina was mild in temperament, gentle in manners, but she might have flown at the ex-captain's face with frantic nails, had he come in her way.

"I did not really like him," she sobbed forth: and there was no question but she spoke truth. "But they were always on at me, persuading me; they never let me alone."

"Who persuaded you, my dear?" asked Janet.

"He did. He was for ever meeting me in private, and urging me. I could not go out for a walk, or just cross the garden, or run into the next door, but he would be there. Mme. St. Vincent persuaded me. She did not say to me in words, 'you had better do as he

asks you and run away,' but all her counsels tacitly tended to it. She would say to me how happy his wife would be; what a fine position it was for any young lady lucky enough to be chosen by him; and that all the world thought me old enough to marry, though Arnold did not, and for that reason Arnold would do his best to prevent it. And so—and so —"

"And so they persuaded you against your better judgment," added Janet pityingly, as Mina broke down in a burst of sobs.

"There, child, drink that, and don't cry your eyes out," interposed Cattledon, bringing in a beaten-up egg.

Cattledon was coming out uncommonly strong in the way of compassion, all her tartness gone. She certainly did not look with an eye of favour on elopements; but she was ready to take up Mina's cause against the man who deceived her. Cattledon hated the Pells: for Cattledon had been done out of fifty pounds at the time of old Pell's failure, which money she had rashly entrusted to him. She could not well afford to lose it, and she had been bitter on the Pells, one and all, ever since.

That morning was destined to be one of elucidation. Mr. Tamlyn was in the surgery, saying a last word to Dr. Knox before the latter went out to visit his patients, when Lettice Lane marched in. She looked so fresh and innocent that three parts of Tamlyn's suspicions of her melted away.

"Anything amiss at home?" asked he.

"No, sir," replied Lettice, "I have only brought this note"—handing one in. "Mme. St. Vincent told the butler to bring it; but his pains are worse this morning; and, as I chanced to be coming out at the moment, he asked me to leave it here for him."

"Wait an instant," said Mr. Tamlyn, as he opened the note.

It contained nothing of consequence. Mme. St. Vincent had written to say that Lady Jenkins was pretty well, but had finished her medicine: perhaps Mr. Tamlyn would send her some more. Old Tamlyn's injunction to wait an instant had been given in consequence of a sudden resolution he had then come to (as he phrased it in his mind) to "tackle" Lettice.

"Lettice Lane," he began, winking at Dr. Knox, "your mistress's state is giving us concern. She seems to be always asleep."

"She is nearly always dozing off, sir," replied Lettice, her tone and looks open and honest as the day.

"Ay. I can't quite come to the bottom of it," returned old Tamlyn, making believe to be speaking confidentially. "To me, it looks just as though she took—took opiates."

"Opiates, sir?" repeated Lettice, as if she hardly knew how to understand the word: while Dr. Knox, behind the desk, was glancing keenly at her from underneath his compressed eyebrows.

"Opium. Laudanum."

Lettice shook her head. "No sir, my mistress does not take

anything of that, I am sure; we have nothing of the kind in the house. But Mme. St. Vincent is for ever dosing her with brandy-and-water."

"What?" shouted old Tamlyn.

"I have said a long while, sir, that I thought you ought to know it; I've said so to the housemaid. I don't believe an hour hardly passes, day or night, but madame administers to her a small drop of brandy-and-water. Half a wine glass, may be, or a full wine glass, as the case may happen; and sometimes I know it's pretty strong."

"That's it," said Dr. Knox quietly: and a curious smile crossed his face.

Mr. Tamlyn sat down on the stool in consternation. "Brandy-and-water!" he repeated, more than once. "Perpetually dosed with brandy-and-water! And now, Lettice Lane, how is it you have not come here before to tell me of this?"

"I did not come to tell you now, sir," returned Lettice. "Mme. St. Vincent says that Lady Jenkins needs it: she seems to give it her for her good. It is only lately that I have doubted whether it can be right. I have not liked to say anything: servants don't care to interfere. Ten times in a day she will give her these drops of cold brandy-and-water: and I know she gets up for the same purpose once or twice in the night."

"Does Lady Jenkins take it without remonstrance?" asked Dr. Knox, speaking for the first time.

"She does, sir, now. At first she did not. Many a time I have heard her say, 'Do you think so much brandy can be good for me, Patty; I feel so dull after it,' and Mme. St. Vincent has replied to her, that it is the only thing that can get her strength back and bring her round."

"The jade!" spoke Dr. Knox, between his teeth. "And to assure us both that all the old lady took was a drop of it weak twice a day at her meals! Lettice Lane," he added aloud, and there was great sternness in his tone, "you are to blame for not having spoken of this. A little longer silence, and it might have cost your mistress her life." And Lettice went out in contrition.

"What can the woman's motive be, for thus dosing her into stupidity?" spoke the one doctor to the other when they were shut in together.

"That: the dosing her into it," said Dr. Knox.

"But the motive, Arnold?—the reason? She must have had a motive."

"That remains to be found out."

It was too true. The culprit was Mme. St. Vincent. She had been administering these constant doses of brandy-and-water for months. Not giving enough at a time to put Lady Jenkins into a state of intoxication; only to reduce her to a chronic state of semi-stupidity.

Tod called me, as I tell you, a muff, and a double muff—first for not knowing Mme. St. Vincent ; and next for thinking to screen her. Of course this revelation of Lettice Lane's had put a new complexion upon things. I left the matter with Tod, and he told the doctors at once : Mme. St. Vincent was, or used to be, Martha Jane Pell, own sister to Captain Collinson the false.

III.

QUIETLY knocking at the door of Jenkins House on this same sunshiny morning went three gentlemen : old Tamlyn, Mr. Lawrence, and Joseph Todhetley. Mr. Lawrence was a magistrate and ex-mayor ; he had preceded the late Sir Daniel Jenkins in the civic chair, and was intimate with him as a brother. Just as old Tamlyn tackled Lettice, so they were now about to tackle Mme. St. Vincent on the score of the brandy-and-water ; and they had deemed it advisable to take Tod with them.

Lady Jenkins was better than usual ; rather less stupid. She was seated with madame in the cheerful garden room, its glass doors standing open to the sunshine and the flowers. The visitors were cordially received ; it was supposed they had but come to pay a morning visit. Madame St. Vincent sat behind a table in the corner, writing notes of invitation for a soirée, to be held that day week. Tod, who had his wits about him, went straight up to her.

“ Ah ! how are you ? ” cried he, holding out his hand. “ Surprised to see you here.” And she turned white, and stared, uncertain how to take his words, or whether he had really recognised her, and bowed stiffly as to a stranger, and never put out her own hand in answer.

I cannot tell you much about the interview : Tod's account to me was not very clear. Lady Jenkins began talking about Captain Collinson—that he had turned out to be some unworthy man of the name of Pell, and had endeavoured to kidnap poor little Mina. Charlotte Knox imparted the news to her that morning, in defiance of Madame St. Vincent, who had tried to prevent her. Madame said it must be altogether some mistake, and that no doubt Captain Collinson would be able to explain : but she, Lady Jenkins, did not know. After that there was a pause ; Lady Jenkins shut her eyes, and madame went on writing her notes.

It was old Tamlyn who opened the ball. He drew his chair nearer the old lady, and spoke out without circumlocution.

“ What is this that we hear about your taking so much brandy-and water ? ”

“ Eh ? ” cried the old lady, opening her eyes. Madame paused in her writing, and looked up. Tamlyn waited for an answer.

“ Lady Jenkins does not take much brandy-and-water,” cried madame.

"I am speaking to Lady Jenkins, madame," returned old Tamlyn, severely: "be so kind as not to interfere. My dear lady, listen to me—taking her hand; I am come here with your life-long old friend, William Lawrence, to talk to you. We have reason to believe that you continually take, and have taken for some time past, small doses of brandy-and-water. Is it so?"

"Patty gives it me," cried Lady Jenkins, looking first at them and then at Patty, in a helpless kind of manner.

"Just so: we know she does. But, are you aware that brandy-and-water, taken in this way, is so much poison?"

"Tell them, Patty, that you give it me for my good," said the poor lady, in affectionate appeal.

"Yes, it is for your good, dear Lady Jenkins," resentfully affirmed Madame St. Vincent, regarding the company with flashing eyes. "Does any one dare to suppose that I should give Lady Jenkins enough to hurt her? I may be allowed, I presume, as her ladyship's close companion, constantly watching her, to be the best judge of what is proper for her to take."

Well, there ensued a shindy—as Tod called it—all of them talking together, save himself and poor Lady Jenkins: and madame defying everybody and everything. They told her that she could no longer be trusted with Lady Jenkins; that she must go out of the house that day; and when madame defied this with a double defiance, the magistrate intimated that he had come up to enforce the measure if necessary, and he meant to stay there until she was gone.

She saw it was serious then, and the defiant tone changed. "What I have given Lady Jenkins has been for her good," she said; "to do her good. But for being supported by a little brandy-and-water, the system could never have held out after that serious attack she had in Boulogne. I have prolonged her life."

"No, madame, you have been doing your best to shorten her life," corrected old Tamlyn. "A little brandy-and-water, as you term it, might have been good for her while she was recovering her strength, but you have gone beyond the little; you have made her life a perpetual lethargy; you would shortly have killed her. What your motive was, Heaven knows."

"My motive was a kind one," flashed madame. "Out of this house I will not go."

So, upon that, they played the trump card, and informed Lady Jenkins, who was crying softly, that this lady was the sister of the impostor, Collinson. The very helplessness, the utter docility to which the treatment had reduced her, prevented her expressing (and most probably feeling) any dissent. She yielded passively to all, like a child, and told Patty that she must go, as her old friends said so.

A bitter pill for madame to take. But she could not help herself.

"You will be as well as ever in a little time," Tamlyn said to Lady

Jenkins. "You would have died, had this gone on: it must have induced some malady or other from which you could not have rallied."

Madame St. Vincent came out of the house that afternoon, and Cattledon entered it. She had offered herself to Lady Jenkins for a few days in the emergency.

It was, perhaps, curious that I should meet Madame St. Vincent before she left the town. Janet was in trouble over a basket of butter and fowls that had been sent her by one of the country patients, and of which the railway people denied the arrival. I went again to the station in the afternoon to see whether they had news of it: and there, seated on the platform bench, her boxes around her, and waiting for the London train, was madame.

I showed myself as respectful to her as ever, for you can't humiliate fallen people to their faces, telling her, in the pleasantest way I could, that I was sorry things had turned out so. The tone seemed to tell upon her, and she burst into tears. I never saw a woman so subdued in the space of a few hours.

"I have been treated shamefully, Johnny Ludlow," she said, gulping down the sobs. "Day and night for the past nine months have I been about Lady Jenkins, wearing myself out in attendance on her. The poor old lady had learnt to love me and to depend upon me. I was like a daughter to her."

"I daresay," I answered, conveniently ignoring the dosing.

"And what I gave her, I gave her for the best," went on madame. "It was for the best. Aged people of seventy years need it. Their nerves and system require to be soothed: to induce sleep now and then must be a blessed boon. It was a boon to her, poor old thing. And this is my recompense!—turned from the house like a dog!"

"It does seem hard."

"Seem! It is. I have had nothing but hardships all my life," she continued, lifting her veil to dry away the tears. "Where I am to go now, or how make a living, I know not. They told me I need not apply to Lady Jenkins for references: and ladies won't engage a companion who has none."

"Is your husband really dead?" I ventured to ask.

"My poor husband is really dead, Johnny Ludlow—I don't know why you should imply a doubt of it. He left me nothing: he had nothing to leave. He was only a master in the college at Brétage—a place in the South of France—and he died, I verily believe, of the poor living. We had not been married twelve months. I had a little baby, and that died. Oh, I assure you I have had my troubles."

"How are—Mr. and Mrs. Clement Pell?" I next asked, with hesitation. "And Conny?—and the rest of them?"

"Oh, they were well when I last heard," she answered, slightly. "I don't hear often. Foreign letters are expensive. Conny was to have come here shortly on a visit."

"Where is Gusty? Is ——"

"I know nothing at all about my brothers," she interrupted sharply. "And this, I suppose, is my train. Good-bye, Johnny Ludlow; you and I at least can part friends. You are always kind. I wish the world was like you."

I saw her into the carriage—first-class—and her boxes into the van. And thus she disappeared from Lefford. And her brother, "Captain Collinson," as we found later, had taken his departure for London by an early morning train, telling little Pink, his landlord, as he paid his week's rent, that he was going up to attend a levée.

It was found that the rumour of his engagement to Miss Belmont was entirely untrue. Miss Belmont was rather indignant about it, freely saying that she was ten years his senior. He had never hinted at such a thing to her, and she should have stopped him if he had. We concluded that the report had been set afloat by himself, to take attention from his pursuit of Mina Knox.

Madame St. Vincent had feathered her nest. As the days went on, and Lady Jenkins grew clearer, better able to see a little into matters, she could not at all account for the money that had been drawn from the bank. Cheque after cheque had been presented and cashed; and not one tenth of the money could have been spent upon home expenses. Lady Jenkins had been always signing cheques; she remembered that much; never so much as asking, in her abnegation of will, what they were needed for. "I want a cheque to-day, dear Lady Jenkins," her companion would say, producing the cheque-book from her desk; and Lady Jenkins would docilely sign it. That a large portion of the proceeds had found their way to Mr. Fabian Pell was looked upon as a certainty.

And hence, the obtaining of this money, might be traced the motive for the dosing of Lady Jenkins. Once let her intellect become clear, her will re-assert itself, and the golden game would be stopped. Madame St. Vincent had also another scheme in her head—for the past month or two she had been trying to persuade Lady Jenkins to make a codicil to her will, leaving her a few thousand pounds. Lady Jenkins might have fallen blindly into that; but they had not as yet been able to agree upon the details: Madame St. Vincent urging that a lawyer should be called in from a distance; Lady Jenkins clinging to old Belford. That this codicil would have been made in time, and by the strange lawyer, there existed no manner of doubt.

Ah, well: it was a deep-laid plot altogether. And my visit to Lefford, with Tod's later one, had served, under Heaven, to frustrate it.

Lady Jenkins got rapidly better, now that she was no longer drugged. In a few days she was herself again. Cattledon came out amazingly strong in the way of care and kindness, and was gracious to everybody, even to Lettice.

"She always forbade me to say that I took the brandy-and-water," Lady Jenkins said to me one day when I was sitting with her under the laburnum tree on her lawn, talking of the past, her bright green silk dress and pink cap ribbons shining in the sun. "She made my will hers. In other respects she was as kind as she could be to me."

"That must have been part of her plan," I answered. "It was the great kindness that won you to her. After that, she took care that you should have no will."

"And the poor thing might have been so happy with me had she only chosen to be straightforward, and not try to play tricks! I gave her a handsome salary, and new gowns besides; and I don't suppose I should have forgotten her at my death."

"Well, it is all over, dear Lady Jenkins; and you will be just as hearty and brisk as you used to be."

"Not quite that, Johnny," she said, shaking her head; "I cannot expect that. At seventy, grim old age is laying its hand upon us. What we need then, my dear," she added, turning her kindly blue eyes upon me, in which the tears were gathering, "is to go to the mill to be ground young again. And that is a mill that does not exist in this world."

"Ah no!"

"I thank God for the mercy He has shown me," she continued, the tears trickling down her cheeks. "I might have gone to the grave in the half-witted state to which I was reduced. And, Johnny, I often wonder, as I lie awake at night thinking, whether I should have been held responsible for it."

The first use Lady Jenkins made of her liberty, was to invite all her relations, the young nephews and nieces, up to dinner, as she used to do. Madame St. Vincent had set her face against these family entertainments, and they had fallen through. The ex-mayor, William Lawrence, and his good old wife, made part of the company, as did Dr. Knox and Janet. Lady Jenkins beamed on them once more from her place at the head of the table, and Tamlyn sat at the foot and served the big plum-pudding.

"Never more, I trust, shall I be estranged from you, my dears, until it pleases Heaven to bring about the final estrangement," she said to the young people, when they were leaving. And she gave them all a sovereign a-piece.

Cattledon could not remain on for ever. Miss Deveen wanted her: so Mina Knox went to stay at Jenkins House, until a suitable lady should be found to replace Madame St. Vincent. Upon that, Dan Jenkins was taken with an anxious solicitude for his aunt's health, and was for ever finding his way up to enquire after it.

"You will never care to notice me again, Dan," Mina said to him, with a swelling heart and throat, one day when he was tilting himself by her on the arm of the sofa.

"Shan't I!" returned Dan.

"Oh, I am so ashamed of my folly; I feel more ashamed of it, day by day," cried Mina, bursting into tears. "I shall never, never get over the mortification."

"Won't you!" added Dan.

"And I never liked him much: I think I *dis*-liked him. At first I did dislike him; only he kept saying how fond he was of me; and Mme. St. Vincent was always praising him up. And you know he was all the fashion."

"Quite so," assented Dan.

"Don't you think it would be almost as well if I were dead, Dan—for all the use I am likely to be of to any one?"

"Almost, perhaps; not quite," laughed Dan; and he suddenly stooped and kissed her.

That's all. And now, at the time I write this, Dan Jenkins is a flourishing lawyer at Lefford, and Mina is his wife. Little feet totter up and down the staircase and along the passages that good old Lady Jenkins used to tread. She treads them no more. There was no mill to grind her young again here; but she is gone to that better land where such mills are not needed.

Her will was a just one. She left her property between her nephews and nieces; a substantial sum to each of them. Dan had Jenkins House in addition. But it is no longer Jenkins House; for he had that name taken off the entrance pillars forthwith, replacing it with the one that had been there before—Rose Bank.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.



A R E V E R I E.

"In maiden meditation."

I lean towards ye, stars that shine and flee,
 Kindling the dark above :
 I stretch wide arms, that gleam across the sea,
 And ask the nightingale, and ask of ye,
 O waves that wander free !
 Of a great mystery shut up from me—
 Creation's mystery, Love !

How cometh he ? The sun
 Shines on the rose's petals whitely rolled,
 Shut closely, fold on fold,
 Till blushes crimson, and the leaf-buds part
 To the warm breathing of her fragrant heart :
 Is sunshine like to love ? the lover's art,
 Great as the sun's to give or to withhold
 The loveliness he praises ? might I be
 Beloved and lovely, should love look on me ?

Wears he the form of eagle or of dove ?
 Drives he his chariot o'er a darken'd sea
 With flame and thunder drest ?
 Or smiles he from a fair cloud's downy breast
 Wind-speeded to the west,
 A cloud with heaven's roses on its breast ?

Or sails he with the birds across the seas
 In the dim shadow of our island trees
 To build a nest ?

A bird that keeps in memory year by year
 The one green covert dear !

So constant he, and true of memory ?
 Or rises he from grasses at full height
 As moth-wings flash from thistledown—a slight
 And blue-eyed boy, bearing a lily crown
 And lily wand ? Alas ! for then I might
 So meeting him amid the languid light,
 Where summer meadows twinkle to the heat,
 Mistake him for a playmate mild and sweet,
 And follow him for many a sultry mile,
 Till lips forget to smile
 And limbs are weak.

Is love so meek, and crafty to beguile,
 While evermore the homeward pathway seems.
 Like a friend's face familiar to our dreams,
 Near to—yet far to seek ?

Or doth he sing
 With birds of leafy spring,
 That call their mates down from the happy skies,
 With sacrifice
 Of strong-winged liberty, and joy secure
 To labour and endure,

To crouch beneath a shadow that deceives,
A sunbeam lifts, and light airs blow apart,
To lay up treasure in the grass and leaves,
With faint unquiet heart :—
To rest unrestfully, beneath the moon
And ever lingering suns of sultry June,
Lulled by a pleasant tune,
A hope unsure ?
Shall love so sing to me, and I give ear
And make a home, and lay up treasure here
Where now I lonely move ?
Shall I, too, listen, casting away fear,
At the sweet call of love ?

What voice hath he
That hearing I may flee
If so he sing to me ?
The blowing of the fitful summer wind
Nurses the new-born fruit within the flower
Whose April bloom it shed :
It whispers in the pine-boughs, and the doves,
Whose cherish'd nest was rifled yesterday,
Whose young have dyed the mosses with their blood,
Shedding their tender plumage to the breeze,
Make soft low answer, wooing at their ease,
And build anew within the dusky trees
Whose fragrant branches cradle to betray :—
Is the wind's voice like love's ? with softest breath
Kindling new life in death,
Inviting to new joy, when joy is dead ?
Then is love strong :
O world so full of blandishment and wrong.
O world of love ! my feet delay to tread

Your mystic bowers :
I stand apart, and hear the ceaseless song
Of “love, love, love,”—yet pain and death are powers,
And the dark places of the earth are red
With cruelty :—But love is strong to shed
Fruit where our lips have fed
On poisons,—flowers where a heart has bled,
Fresh flowers above the dead !

I cannot see his face, or touch his hand
Here, in the starlit darkness where I stand
And lean from out this sea-girt balcony :
Can it be *he* whose whisper in my ears
Drowning the festive harmony, has sent
Me from rejoicing friends in discontent,
As blinded by my tears, I stand apart,
And listen to the murmur of the sea—
And of my heart ?

C. M. GEMMER.

ROBERT DICK, THE THURSO NATURALIST.

FEW visitors to the lovely scenery of Alloa and the Bridge of Allan are likely to make a pilgrimage to Tullibody, even if they are aware that it was the birthplace not only of one of Nature's gentlemen, but of one of the most deeply-read and highly-cultured scientific geniuses who ever saw daylight on either side of the Tweed.

Yet the village merits a visit for its own sake, nestled, as it is, beneath the shadow of the Ochil hills, with the silver Devon meandering in the vale below, and the heights of Dummyat and Buccleuch within reach, whence can be seen the windings of the Forth, the Abbey Craig, the Campsie Fells, and the castles of Stirling and Edinburgh in the dim, far distance.

The "poetic child," born and bred in this out-of-the-way nook, and who never had the chance of straying beyond the bounds of his native Caledonia, or even of investigating the half of her brown heaths and shaggy woods, was Robert Dick, botanist, geologist, and baker, the friend and coadjutor of Hugh Miller; of whom Sir Roderick Murchison once told the assembled members of the British Association that "this distinguished man was able to instruct the Director-General of the Geographical Society, and might well have been a professed ornament of Section D (Zoology and Botany)."

Robert Dick was born in 1810, and left motherless almost in infancy. Having received something more than the elements of a liberal education at one of those Scottish parish schools which have turned out so many sound, thoughtful scholars, his hopes of University and professional life were quenched when his father, an Excise officer, burdened with another brood of bairns, apprenticed him, at thirteen years of age, to the prosaic trade of the Tullibody baker. He had, however, found the second Mrs. Dick so stern a step-mother that the new life was liberty to him. He had to get up at three in the morning, light the oven fire, help to prepare the dough for the day's baking, "set" it in, draw it out, serve customers, sweep the shop, and clean the bakehouse. Yet he managed so to perform his duties and demean himself towards his master and mistress as to gain their kindly regard and respect, and the warm affection of their children, for whom he collected many little treasures, besides bringing them posies of way-side flowers and pockets full of hazel nuts.

When strong enough to carry a heavy bread-basket on his head, and old enough to be trusted so far from home, he was sent to deliver loaves in the neighbouring villages, such as Menstrie, Blairlogie, and the Bridge of Allan; and it was on these journeys that Nature took him by the hand and began to show him her secrets.

He watched the leaves as they grew, and the buds as they swelled out and burst into blossom, learned to know their habits and their favourite nooks and corners, and made them his familiar friends.

He had no money to spend in books, for he received no wages, but only bed and board in return for his services. His father had to clothe him, while the step-mother provided for his washing, and was decidedly sparing in her quantum of clean clothes. But in spite of his hard work and few opportunities, he contrived to pick up knowledge, as people who love it always do. There were no science primers nor cheap books in those days, but he borrowed some volumes of the old Edinburgh Encyclopædia, and studied them in good earnest. By their means he found out the names of his beloved plants, and a little about their orders, genera, and species. Love, the great teacher, and a habit of patient and pains-taking observation filled up all gaps, and helped him to supply the connecting links between one and another.

At seventeen his apprenticeship was over ; his family had removed to Thurso, in the extreme north of Scotland, and he had to choose his own course and "fend" for himself. A packet-boat plied betwixt Alloa and Leith. By it Robert Dick went thither, and soon found a situation as journeyman, which he gave up after a six months' trial, and made his way to Glasgow, and afterwards to Greenock.

He made no friends and few acquaintances, and after a three years' exile from the hills and dales and universal face of Nature, wrote and told his father that work was heavy and wages small, and he saw no prospect of improving his position. The parent's answer told him that in the whole county of Caithness there were only three bakers' shops : one at Thurso, one at Wick, and another at Castleton ; and that as the first-named town was a thriving and increasing place, there was room for competition.

So Robert Dick set his face northward, and journeyed to the desolate Scandinavian county, which was thenceforth to be his home and the scene of his life labours.

A shop was taken for him in Wilson's Lane, nearly opposite his father's house : but an oven had to be built before he could commence business. Meanwhile he took holiday, wandered on the sea shore, and made acquaintance with its wonders. Strange bits of flotsam and jetsam are washed up on the western Scottish and Norwegian coasts : tropical seaweeds, West Indian nuts and seeds, drift-wood from Honduras and Campeachy Bay, are brought by the Gulf Stream and deposited on the bleak stones : from whence the ocean stretches wide and uninterrupted till it washes the shores of Labrador.

Caithness is altogether a wind-swept, barren land, almost entirely bare of trees, and sloping upwards from the sea to the hills and mountains which divide it from Sutherlandshire. So few and bad were the roads, or rather tracks, a century ago that there was not a single wheeled cart in the whole county, and traffic was carried on

by means of files of pack-horses, the reminiscence of which may here and there be seen in the antiquated signboard of a solitary inn. But the salmon swim by thousands up the Thurso river, the billows break in savage grandeur on its shore; the old red sandstone cliffs raise rugged, hoary heads above the water, and the heather blooms profusely in its season. Robert Dick revelled in them all, and especially in the sea, in whose changing aspects and varying voices he found the sense of companionship he never sought for among his own species.

Most of his neighbours lived on oatmeal porridge, oatcakes, and barley bannocks of home manufacture, and rarely indulged in bakers' bread, unless it were a loaf bought on Saturday for the Sunday's eating. But still there was a little needed every day, and as that little was made by the tradesman's own hands, and disposed of over his counter on the principle of small profits and quick returns, but little capital was required. Therefore a man who had but few personal wants, and no one dependent on him, made a living where many others would have starved.

Dick had no idea of dealing with strangers or finding what was the cheapest market to buy in, being probably deficient in the quality usually called business. But he had a notion of keeping up a kindly commerce with the master under whose roof his years of apprenticeship had been passed. He ordered his bags of flour from him at Tullibody: and was not only allowed a certain amount of credit, but favoured with the elder baker's recipes for biscuit making, and sundry letters in which the latter intimated that he had daughters to marry, one or other of whom might not be inclined to turn a deaf ear to the wooing of her childhood's friend and playmate. A Greenock acquaintance wrote to him in the same strain, but the young man knew his own mind and went courting in his own fashion. His inamorata refused him, so he engaged a Highland woman as his housekeeper, who served him faithfully to his life's end. Like not a few other intellectual men, he espoused his favourite pursuits with his whole soul and found them all-sufficing.

When the day's bread was baked, Robert's time was at his own disposal till it was time to set the sponge, heat the oven, and prepare another batch: operations that were conducted in the small hours of the morning while the rest of the world was still asleep. Thus he had all the daylight free to prosecute his researches and seek the lore he loved. Along the Thurso beach he collected shells by the score and arranged them in a cabinet, losing no opportunity of learning all he could about them.

As he wandered by the sea-worn cliffs, his keen eyes detected the scales of fossil fish and even their heads, fins, and tails imbedded in the stone, and he satisfied himself that—to use his own expression—the very "walls of Thurso were built of dead fish." He studied phrenology as far as he could, but relinquished it for more practical things; borrowed all the books he could get on astronomy, but had

no telescope to use, and therefore fell back from the distant wonders of the starry heavens to the nearer ones of earth, whose mysteries seemed to unveil themselves before his seeing eyes.

When about twenty-five years old he began to make an entomological collection, and worked so hard at it that in nine months he had collected specimens of every insect that has its home in Caithness. Not satisfied with the information he could obtain in other ways, he tried to follow all the processes through which these creatures go in progressing towards their final development, searching out the grubs, and watching the larvæ and chrysalises until the winged flies made their appearance.

Meanwhile he was prospering in his trade and acquiring quite a reputation for biscuits and "parliament." So, after satisfying all his modest personal requirements, he had money to spare, which he spent in books. He now ordered his flour from Leith, and commissioned the merchant with whom he dealt to buy him the volumes for which his soul craved. That worthy procured for him at various times the Gardeners' Dictionary, *Floragraphia Britannica*, Hogarth's works, illustrated books on botany, conchology, and geology, and also a powerful and expensive microscope.

His botanical excursions were mostly made alone, with a little store of ship biscuits in his pocket, and a pair of thick hob-nailed boots on his feet. He always soaked his stockings in water, and when he came to a burn soaked them again. He mapped out Caithness into districts and resolved to examine each of them in turn for its own particular flora. So he visited every plant in its own home, wandered about the Reay hills in quest of ferns, up the river banks for grasses, to a mountain top for a single plant of white heather, and over the moors for mosses.

This is what he says of the plants native to the bare county he explored :—

"People in the south think that, as Caithness is so far north, its flora must differ greatly from that in their own neighbourhood. No doubt the general aspect of a district in the south differs very strikingly in its prominent features. And yet, after all, we have very few plants that may not also be found in the south. The Caithness flora is not alpine—not even sub-alpine. I know of only three Baltic plants in Caithness ; and of these only one is a rarity. Indeed it is peculiar to Caithness ; for Caithness is the only British district in which it grows. We have the Baltic rush by the river side. But then *Juncus balticus* grows at Barry Sands, near Dundee. Last summer I was much pleased to meet the Baltic rush growing in a small marsh about six miles inland. I was highly delighted. I had never seen it so far from the sea."

Eighteen miles away from home he found a plant or two of the rue-leaved spleenwort, and every year he walked all that distance to visit the little fern and see how it fared. On the banks of the river

he discovered the *Hierochloë borealis*, or Northern Holy Grass : the beautiful spiral-stemmed, golden-seeded, sweet-scented plant with which the Swedish and Norwegian churches are strewn in summer time. Later in life he entered seriously on the study of mosses, though not till the silver cord was loosening and the end near.

One day when a terrible storm had been raging over land and sea, the wind howling like mad and roaring like thunder, Dick went down to the shore and thus related what he saw :—

“ I found a piece of old land strewed here and there with prostrate hazel stems. I picked out of the clay five nuts. How long it is since they grew I know not, but it must have been ages ago. Perhaps geologists would say that they grew when Britain stood thirty feet higher than it does now. But that is all conjecture. Certainly the land along our shores had once a very different appearance.”

Another time he found fossil fishes in the slaty rocks while seeking his botanical specimens, not a little to his surprise, for distinguished geologists had declared that no fossil remains were to be found in the Scotch Highlands. But he read and pondered for himself, and believed the facts that came under his own notice before other men's theories ; and before long a new light arose for him in the shape of a series of articles by the late Hugh Miller, entitled “ The Old Red Sandstone,” and published in the *Witness* newspaper, of which he was editor.

His mind was now set on the right track, and he retraced his steps hither and thither in Caithness with a new end in view. With only one exception, he found specimens of all the Ichthyolites of the lower old red sandstone, and generously made them over to his new friend. After a considerable amount of correspondence, Hugh Miller paid him a visit, inspected his treasure-trove, and went with him to the places whence it had been dug out with infinite toil and pains. He urged Mr. Dick to examine the boulder-clay for traces of marine shells, a pursuit into which he entered with ardour. This led him to embrace what is known as the glacial theory : that is to say, the probable action of glaciers on the land in what may be called the great ice period, when the climate of Great Britain was pretty much the same as that of Labrador is now.

The Thurso baker was pre-eminently a letter-writer—a gift not nearly so common as may be supposed—and his pleasant, chatty epistles touch on all subjects in earth and heaven, over and above the scientific details they contain. The following passage, written to Hugh Miller anent the annoyances he experienced from the leaders of the sect of which the *Witness* was the organ, has quite a Carlylean flavour in its shrewd common sense :—

“ I candidly say that it is very hard that you cannot enjoy yourself for one day among the rocks without being assailed for it by ignorant W. W.'s, be they clerical or not. Great stir about tyrannical popery at present ; but, query, may there not be among ourselves

moderate popes, free popes, and such like? Plenty, I guess. The divine right of ruling is worth ten times the stipend."

In another strain he acknowledges the receipt of some journals containing an account of the meeting of the British Association at Edinburgh, and says :

"These papers are not thrown away. They shall be duly pondered and considered. Ay, on mountain tops, even at early dawn or sober eve, when the twinkling stars and the soothing winds tell their own tale of nature's happiness in their own dear way."

This pleasant interchange of thoughts came to a sudden end with Hugh Miller's life, in 1856. The only other like-minded friend Dick ever had was a Mr. Peach, a custom-house officer well known for his researches among the fossils of the Cornish coast. After being moved about from place to place all over the country, this gentleman found himself posted at Wick, and lost little time in going over to Thurso, where he called at the baker's shop in Wilson's Lane, and was told by the housekeeper that her "maister" was in the bakehouse.

The stranger sent in his name, which had the effect of bringing Dick at once from his work with bare arms. He put out a floury hand, and invited him into the bakehouse, where he went on with his employment and talked at the same time. On the wall of this sanctum the stranger observed a life-sized sketch of the Greek boy taking the thorn out of his foot, with an Egyptian god on either side; and, on enquiring, found that the baker had drawn them there in charcoal. Upstairs, he saw a fine bust of Sir Walter Scott, another of Lord Byron, and a large plaster figure of the Venus of Milo, besides expensive books, and a perfect museum of fossils, dried plants, and insects: and found the greatest pleasure in the "cheerful manner, sparkling wit, and frolicsome playfulness" of his new acquaintance.

Some time later, Sir Roderick Murchison called on Dick, and found him too busy with his batch of bread to give the baronet an audience; but another year he went again, in company with Mr. Peach, when both were admitted to the bakehouse. On Sir Roderick complaining that there was no proper map of Caithness, the baker took a few handfuls of flour, and spreading them out on his board, made a model in relief of the geological structure of the county: the hills and dales, rocks, watersheds, drainage, and, indeed, an outline of its entire geography. It was shortly after this interview that Sir Roderick expatiated to his audience at Leeds about the marvellous knowledge acquired by the humble baker of Thurso.

Thenceforth he had many visitors, but however great they might be, or rich in this world's gear, he never left his business to attend on them, though he invariably recognised and welcomed true brothers of Nature's guilds.

Years rolled over his head; his father and sisters, for whom he

seems to have had a warm affection, died one after the other; misfortune overtook him in the wreck of a steamer on board of which he had forty-five pounds' worth of flour uninsured; he had no store laid up for a rainy day, and his health began to fail. The town of Thurso increased, and bakers multiplied; he could not withstand their competition, and sank into weary depression, though his biographer says he never lost his good temper, his charity, or his hope. His neighbours looked upon him as an oddity, and his pursuits as uncanny. He had long left off going to kirk, because the minister preached at him for taking country rambles on Sabbath mornings, but he lived an upright, just, and gentle life, studying his Bible with as much zeal as he did the book of nature. He died on Christmas Eve, 1866, in poverty and unavoidable debt, and his fellow-townsmen followed him to his last resting-place in the cemetery which overlooks the shore he loved.

Men frequently deck the tombstones of the departed from whom they have withheld the right-hand of fellowship during life, and the fact that we seldom know the worth of any person or thing till we have lost it, is curiously illustrated by the monument raised to Robert Dick's memory in Thurso cemetery. But his work survives him, and is held in honour by the few who really understand and sympathise with it; and perhaps that is all he would have cared for. Some points in his character remind one of Thoreau, the Massachusetts naturalist, who loved and lived with Nature. But Dick does not seem to have cared for the living animals as he did, nor to have possessed the strange magnetic power that drew birds, beasts, and fishes to the companionship of his Transatlantic congener.

Yet it is interesting to look at their life-stories side by side, and trace the poetic element in their uneventful pilgrimages through the wilderness of this world, which, to their keen and loving vision, blossomed as the rose, and was full of those things of beauty which are joys for ever.



EASTER EGGS.

I.

THEY come to you of all sizes and of all colours : purple, and yellow, crimson, orange, and puce. The children bring them, beggars bring them, your friends send them. Some come in china bowls, some in baskets arranged with moss and flowers, and some are simply presented on plates. You are not bound to eat them—that is one comfort, else the inconvenience might decidedly be very great, since every egg is boiled to the consistence of a bullet, and is, of course, cold. Nevertheless, the custom is pretty, and the eggs themselves are pretty, the bright hues given them by the dye with which they are boiled enduing them with a most picturesque look as they lie piled among moss and flowers. Sometimes they are presented in company with *galettes* and *goffres*—two kinds of cake very popular in Belgium—the latter being a species of pancake, while the other is the identical cake which in foreign pictures of Little Red Riding-hood we see depicted in that hapless damsel's basket, side by side with the traditional butter.

During my first Easter in the Ardennes, a whole love story came to my ears through an Easter egg and a little basket of *galettes*. I will not tell the tale ; it shall tell itself.

"I hear Monsieur is going to Liège," said a sweet voice.

I lowered my gun with its muzzle to the ground, and looked at the speaker. She was the brightest, neatest little figure I had ever seen ; a brunette, with sparkling hazel eyes, and blue-black hair, and cheeks of a brownish ruddy hue—a very picture of health and comely strength. Not very delicate or refined-looking, perhaps ; yet, nevertheless, having the happier beauty of a sound mind in a sound body, with all that cheerful readiness about her which is one of the best gifts of robust health.

"Mademoiselle, it is true. I go to Liège on Easter-even. Can I do anything for you there ?"

The brown cheek grew redder, with just a tiny tinge of crimson, which was gone in a moment, for these brunettes do not show upon their faces every shade of thought and feeling as the sensitive blondes are fain to do.

"Monsieur is very good ; if only I might venture to ask a favour ?"

"Ask," I responded, smiling. "I will execute your commission with pleasure."

"First, if Monsieur would let me explain who I am. I am Fifine, grand-niece to Madame Rodière."

Madame Rodière was the old lady who did me the honour to be my housekeeper, and I had heard her speak often of Josephine as a good, honest girl, who did much of the work on the little farm which her father rented.

"Mademoiselle Josephine, pray enter and seat yourself: then you shall tell me what you want at Liège."

This little conversation had taken place in my garden, just as I was going out in the hope of shooting some hoopoes* which I had seen in a meadow close by. The April wind was cutting and keen, and I was glad, therefore, to get the pretty Josephine into a warm seat by the kitchen fire. She did not use much circumlocution in coming at her request.

"Monsieur, I have a friend at Liège; will you charge yourself with a little basket for him?"

She drew it from beneath her shawl as she spoke—a pretty little covered basket of coloured straw.

"It is only a few galettes and an Easter egg; but Félix always expects them from me at Easter, and I should be so sorry to disappoint him."

"And is this all?" said I, taking the basket from her hand. "Is there no message, no letter?"

"Alas! Monsieur, I cannot write, neither can Félix; but we do not forget each other."

Again the tinge of crimson deepened her brown cheek, yet she gazed at me with steadfast, unshrinking eyes, as she continued in a firmer tone:

"We are betrothed, Félix and I. And we have not seen each other for two years. He was home on furlough, then, for a little while."

"So Félix is a soldier," I rejoined, doubtfully. "Is it a wise thing for an industrious girl like you to marry a soldier?"

"He was 'drawn,'" she answered, sighing; "he could not help being a soldier. His family was too poor to buy a substitute for him, so he is obliged to serve. He has served five years now, so in two more he will be free."

"And will it be prudent," I reiterated, "to expect a man, who has been seven years a soldier, to return home and take up industrious pursuits again? Félix will like soldiering too well for that; at the expiration of his seven years' service he will enlist and get his bounty."

Fifine opened her clear hazel eyes wide, and looked at me wonderingly.

"Monsieur has not seen Félix; when he has seen him he will not say that. He will not ask, either, whether it will be wise to marry him. I have known him and loved him all my life long," she added

* These beautiful birds are seen at times in the Ardennes in going or returning from their migrations.

innocently, as she arose and made me a little curtsey by way of leave-taking.

"Stay, Mademoiselle Fifine; you have not told me where to find your friend."

"At the barracks, if Monsieur will not mind going."

"And whom must I ask for at the barracks?"

"Félix Roussel. And if Monsieur would kindly put the basket in his hand and say: 'From Fifine Rodière, with a thousand kind thoughts,' there will be no need of more."

"But if Félix asks questions, what shall I say?"

"Please then tell him La Mère Vigneron's rheumatism is better, and my father has bought a new cow—we have called her Blanchette—and we have ten lambs this Easter. Oh, and tell him, too, that his father can walk quite well now with a stick, and on Sundays, coming home from Mass, he leans on my arm."

She made me another little curtsey, and ran away, as if she thought she had already detained me too long.

"What an absurd commission!" I said within myself, as I eyed the basket with some discontent. "The idea of making me a messenger to carry love tokens! But these Ardennais peasants trouble themselves little about the fitness of things."

II.

AT Liège I hired a fly, and drove up to the barracks with my galettes and the variegated Easter egg reposing on the cushion beside me. At the gateway I found an old sergeant, grey-headed and grim, smoking a surreptitious pipe with an air of fierce satisfaction.

"Can I see a young soldier named Félix Roussel, of the 4th Company?" I asked, putting my head from the window.

The old sergeant withdrew his pipe from his lips slowly, and shook his head.

"The poor garçon is in hospital," he said. "You cannot see him without an order from the colonel. And as this is not visiting-day, you won't get one."

Deliberately as he had withdrawn the pipe from his lips he restored it, and smoked on stolidly, with a Flemish phlegm sorely aggravating to a quick temperament. Now, while it appeared to me perfectly easy to see Félix Roussel, I had not cared much about my mission; in fact, the affair had presented itself to me in a ridiculous light, and I had once or twice felt tempted to give the fair Fifine's galettes to some hungry street dog, and pelt him afterwards with the Easter egg. But lo! a difficulty springs up; a piece of military routine and a stolid Flemish sergeant stand in my way, and immediately my spirit is roused, and I feel bound in honour to overcome all obstacles, and deposit Mademoiselle Josephine's offering in the hands of her expectant lover.

"Where does the colonel live, my friend?"

The sergeant did not trouble himself to answer. Lifting one heavy hand, he pointed to a house near, and then, with extreme slowness, he permitted his hand to sink again into the pocket of his baggy trousers.

"You are Flemish, I think?"

An almost imperceptible nod was the only reply I received. His first speech, being a long one, had evidently exhausted him. Nevertheless, I was resolved to make him talk.

"What part of Flanders do you come from, friend?"

He looked aggravated, yet with the pipe between his teeth, he condescended to say—"Jabakkuk."

"Ah! a delightful village!" I cried, cheerfully. "I know it well. Smooth and flat as a table. No nonsensical trees and rocks there to hinder tillage. No hills to tire men and horses. Not a tree to be seen, except a stray pollard willow, or here and there a straight line of poplars, standing like soldiers at drill. And plenty of fine wholesome water in the ditches."

Was I mistaken, or did a gleam of satisfaction shoot from those small, boiled, blue eyes? Yes, and the pipe comes out of the mouth now.

"Ja! ja! Jabakkuk is a fine place!"

"What corn!" I exclaimed.

"What grass!" said the sergeant.

"What horses!—thick as elephants!" I continued.

"What tobacco! Ah!"

"You are right. What splendid land for tobacco!"

"And himmel! what beer!" said the sergeant.

"Petermann! and Faro!"* I cried. "Come and have a glass now."

The sergeant was won. He came, he drank, he thawed, he condescended to initiate me into certain military rules and ceremonies, which satisfactorily fulfilled, I might pierce the sealed doors of the hospital, and see Félix Roussel.

Enough that I got safely through them all, and was conducted by the sergeant himself into a long and exquisitely clean ward, lined on either side by white beds. To my surprise, he passed silently through this; as I glanced at each sickly face, thinking first this, then that was Félix Roussel, and coming at last to a small door at the end, he opened it softly, laying at the same time his finger on his lips, and whispering, in a strange voice, "Hush!"

The door was shut again immediately, and to my intense astonishment I found myself in darkness.

"This is the *blind* ward," whispered the sergeant, as I stood silent, groping with my hands, and wondering where I was.

The stillness of the room was so intense that the sound of his voice seemed unnatural, and the echo of our own steps grated harshly on my ear.

* The names of two celebrated Belgian brews.

In a moment or two my eyes got accustomed to the obscurity, and I perceived the darkness was not so great as I had imagined. And I now saw dimly many a weary figure lying or sitting listless, with drooping head, and hands clasped idly on the knees. Some were in bed with faces hidden on the pillow, as though even the scanty light admitted here was too great a pain for the vexed eyes to bear. It struck me at first as cruel to place these melancholy patients together in their dismal darkness; but then, if their affliction obliged them to shut out the sunshine, it was easy to comprehend why the hospital authorities had assembled them in one ward.

Scarcely a figure stirred at our entrance; the pitiful patience of blindness seemed to weigh down every head in hopeless apathy. Through the long length of the dismal room, the Flemish sergeant led me silently, till we reached a bed on which a young man sat in an attitude of patient weariness. His eyes were bandaged by a thick handkerchief, leaving visible only his pale, haggard cheeks and bearded mouth. One hand, white and thin with long sickness and unrest, lay on the quilt, the other pressed his forehead. No words can paint upon the mind the picture of lonely, bitter dejection presented by this pale and woe-ful figure.

"Félix, lad," said the sergeant, "here is a friend come to see thee."

Mechanically at the sergeant's voice the hand upon his brow formed the military salute, then fell down helpless, and no change, no hope, no smile passed over the wan face.

"A friend from the Ardennes," said I—"a friend from Saint Hilaire."

Then I saw his lips quiver, and his thin hand clutched the quilt, as with a sudden spasm.

"I cannot see you," he said wearily, stretching his other hand towards me; "and the voice is a stranger's."

"A stranger's, yes; but I bring you a message from friends. Josephine Rodière sends you this."

And into the thin hand held so helplessly towards me, I put the little basket that I had so foolishly despised. Heavens! what a treasure it was here! What a light of hope and joy it brought upon that woe-worn face! What a smile played upon the pale lips, as his hand passed over it caressingly!

"Josephine!" he said. "Then she has not forgotten me!"

Word for word, I repeated her message, while he listened with head bent forward, and a life and hope upon his face that, a moment ago, I should have said it could never wear again.

"Your parents, your friends, and Josephine know nothing of your illness," I continued. "Why have you kept them in ignorance of this misfortune?"

"How could I tell them?" he cried, as his hand pressed painfully on his darkened eyes. "It is too dreadful to tell."

I was silent. I felt such evil tidings were indeed terrible, and I already dreaded to be the messenger of such woe.

"Cheer up, lad!" said the sergeant. "You will get your discharge at any rate."

The young man raised his patient face with a weary sigh.

"I am a log now upon the earth," he said. "I was a help at home once—a prop—a comfort; but in the weary days to come I must eat bread that I have never earned, and be a burden to those I love best. O sergeant! they should take me out and shoot me now."

His head fell forward on his hands, and he groaned in anguish of spirit. I could think of no words to comfort him, neither could the sergeant, for he stole silently away, and left me with him alone. But the young man himself cast aside his misery for a moment, as he spoke again of his love.

"Ah! Fifine was always a famous hand at galettes," he said; "and here is an Easter-egg. Will monsieur tell me its colour?"

"Violet," I answered.

"Ah! a sad colour. She must have guessed I was sorrowful."

"No; she did not guess it; but I think you should write to her and tell her. Reflect what a shock your misfortune will be to her, to your mother, to all, if you do not let them hear of it before you return home. The sergeant tells me you will get your discharge very shortly. I will write a letter willingly for you, if you like."

He consented to my proposition with a wistful smile, and, writing materials being procured, he dictated as follows. I put down word for word what he said, altering nothing. At our end of the long, obscure room we were quite alone, the other patients, with kindly tact, keeping away from us. Here is the letter of the poor blind soldier:—

"**MY DEAR FIFINE**,—I thank you with my whole heart for your Easter gift; it came to me as the leaves come in May,* when the sun makes a sudden summer, and winter and frost vanish. For, my dear Fifine, I am very sad; a great misfortune has befallen me. I was at work here, on the new fortifications, when a mine we had made to blow up a great rock exploded too soon, and I and six other men were badly hurt. Fifine, dear friend, the hurt fell upon my eyes, and I am blind. The doctors say that, with care and rest, I may see again one day; but the good God knows; I have no hope of that myself. I am useless now as a soldier, so my colonel has sent to Brussels for my discharge, and it is expected every day. Fifine, I shall come home with a sad heart, because my father is a poor man, and I fear I shall be a burden to him all my life long. I sit through the weary day upon my bed, thinking and wondering what I shall do, not to be a burden. My poor mother is getting old and feeble. I thought to help her—I

* There is no spring in the Ardennes. The weather changes from frost and snow to intense heat, and the trees in a few days are full of leaves.

thought to work for her : but all that is over now, and I can only say, may the good God's will be done !

" Fifine, my dear, because I write this to you, do not think I make any claim on you, or wish to hold you to that promise you gave me so long ago. No ; I hope I am not so wicked. I shall never *see* your dear face again ; but when you give yourself to some happier man, he will let me take your hand and kiss your cheek, and bless you with my whole heart. And, until I die, you will be my sole and only love upon the earth. There, I will not say any more of this, because you have a kind heart, and I should wring it if I told you all my heavy thoughts as I brood in darkness over my happiness gone. Fifine, when I took your pretty present in my hand, and heard your message, I felt you still loved me ; but that does not hinder that we must part, my dearest ; I am only a blind burden, a helpless drag, not a man who can work for a wife, and bring a blessing to his home. If Henri Lefèvre still cares for you, I will try to take him by the hand, and wish him and you joy. I will, indeed, Fifine.

" My dear love, will you go to my poor mother, and break to her the news of my blindness as gently as you can ? Do not tell mother the news all at once ; relate it to her little by little, and try chiefly to make her think of the joy I shall have in coming home. But do not expect me, dear friend, for a fortnight yet, because you know I must walk home, and being blind, I scarcely know yet how I shall manage to accomplish the journey. Perhaps I shall find a comrade going my way, who will charge himself for a little time with the care of a poor blind man.

" I am glad Mère Vigneron's rheumatism is better. Give my respects to her, and to all friends. Present my duty to father and mother, and embrace my mother for me on both cheeks. I am pleased Farmer Rodière has a new cow. I send my respectful homage to all at your home, and subscribe myself, my dear Fifine, your devoted servant and friend,

" FELIX ROUSSEL.

" P.S.—Stroke Blanchette for me. Is the rye coming up finely this spring ? Ah, Fifine ! I shall not help your father to reap it, as I did two years ago. Do not grieve about me ; doubtless things will go happily for me, when I am once more among you all. Always thine,

" FELIX."

On finishing this I bade the poor soldier adieu, and, after posting his letter, I went straight to call on the colonel of his regiment. From him I ascertained that Félix Roussel's discharge was not expected from the authorities at Brussels for another week. I was glad to hear this, as it would give me time to go on to Louvain, and conclude the business I had in hand there, and on my return I would hire a vehicle, and drive the poor blind soldier home to Saint Hilaire myself.

III.

My business detained me a day or two longer than I expected ; but still I had no thought of being disappointed in seeing Félix Roussel when I drove up to the hospital and asked for him. "He is gone, sir ; he left two days ago."

"With whom ?—how ?"

"On foot. A young woman, apparently a relative, was with him."

This was all they knew. And I drove on to the barracks, trusting my friend, the Flemish sergeant, would be able to enlighten me further. But he was away on a long march, and I was fain to leave Liège in ignorance of all details respecting the poor soldier's departure. And now, having no longer the hope of his company, I renounced my intention of driving home by the hilly road between Liège and Marche, but chose the pleasanter way of going to Namur by railroad, and thence up the Meuse by steamer to Dinant. At this picturesque town, I hired a species of tilbury, with a stout Ardennais pony, and drove steadily on through the lovely scenery which lies between the Meuse and the Ardennes.

From hill to hill, over long straight roads, poplar-lined, I went but slowly, half wearying of my loneliness, till on a bridge, at the foot of a steep ascent, I drew up to rest awhile. The bridge was, more properly speaking, a viaduct, and I looked down upon a noble valley, beautifully wooded, and watered by a clear stream which dashed along rapidly, over rocks and boulders. Suddenly, amid the deep stillness surrounding me, I heard the murmur of voices, and glancing towards the sunnier side of the vale, I saw two figures seated on a bank by the water's edge. One was a young woman, stout, strong, firmly made : the other was a poor creature attenuated by sickness, and worn out by pain and weariness.

Almost at the first glance I recognized them. They were Félix Roussel and Josephine Rodière. Wondering at the girl's strength and constancy, I stood awhile, listening to their talk.

"Fifine, ma chère amie, I am exhausted," said the soldier, in a feeble voice. "Thou seest I can go no farther. Leave me here, and go on to the nearest village, and seek a shelter for thyself for the night."

Fifine paid no attention to this counsel. "See here, Félix," she replied, "I will sit here with thee on this bank, and rest as long as thou wilt ; but say no more to me of leaving thee on the road, because that cuts me to the heart."

"O Fifine ! I am weary unto death," moaned the blind man, as he fell back heavily on the grass. "Why should I deceive you ? I can walk no more, my poor friend."

"When you have rested, Félix, you will feel stronger. Lean on me, and try to sleep."

"I cannot sleep, Fifine. My eyes smart, and ache, and sting so cruelly, that my courage is fast ebbing away, and I feel I can bear the pain no longer."

The girl laid his head gently on the grass, and rising, she went to the bank, and steeped her handkerchief in the clear water, then, first removing the bandage that bound them, she laid it softly on his eyes.

"That does you good, Félix, I know."

"O, Fifine, what a weary burden I am to you," he answered, as she went to and fro to the brook, continually renewing the cooling bandage till he felt relieved.

"There now, Félix, you talk like a child again. Why vex me with such words?"

"Because they are true. I have leaned on you the whole way from Liège : it is your arm that has supported me, your strength that has borne me up. But for you, I should have fallen on the road a hundred times. And if I can reach home, Fifine, it will be your courage, your constancy that will accomplish the task. As for me, left alone, I would lie down, and only pray to die. Oh, my dear, dear love, you have been very good to the poor blind, helpless creature who clings to you so weakly."

Fifine did not answer him ; she turned her face away, though he could not see her, and shed tears silently. I had long understood that the letter I had written had brought the brave girl to her lover's aid, and I thought the richest lady in the land might envy her those tears.

"Fifine," said the soldier, anxiously, as though the silence terrified him, "are you there?"

"I am here, Félix," she answered, in a cheerful voice, stifling her tears.

"You are very patient with me," he said, softly. "Are you tired?"

"Tired ! a great strong girl like me ! No, indeed, Félix."

"I mean, are you weary of my complaints?" he continued, searching gropingly for her hand. "Fifine, I will never forget your kindness : whether I live or whether I die, I will never forget it. I try to think that I may accept it now, on this weary journey, because it is the last time I will give you trouble. Once at home, I will pray the burgomaster to get me into an asylum for the blind."

"You will do no such thing," answered Fifine, quickly. "What ! may I not work for you ? Do you want to break my heart, Félix ?"

The young man was silent. I saw that pride and sorrow chained his lips. To him it seemed impossible to accept this devotion ; but he would not say so now, since it pained her to hear it.

"Fifine, if I vex you, forgive me ; it is not Félix who speaks, it is

the blind, sick soldier, who has wearied for a sight of your face these two years, and now that it is near him, he cannot see it."

She stooped forward and kissed him.

"But it will always be near you, Félix. Do you hear me? All your life long my hand will be close by to help you, as it is now."

She put her arm around him, and lifted him gently, as she would a child ; and as his head fell upon her shoulder, I thought that if his poor scarred eyes could weep, they would weep now.

"Fifine," he said, after a moment's silence, "the sun is getting low; I will try to go on. I feel better now I have rested."

"Then let me replace the bandage on your poor eyes, Félix."

As she spoke, she removed the damp and folded handkerchief resting on them, and he, seizing her hand, instantly exclaimed :

"Fifine! I see bars!"

She fell on her knees, gazing at him wildly.

"Félix! Félix! You will not be blind! Oh, thank God! You will not be blind! It is my hand you see—my great clumsy fingers. Oh, how glad I am!—how glad I am!"

The sight of his joy touched me strangely, and I was forced to look away for a moment, lest my own eyes should fill with foolish tears. I would have gone down into the vale to help them long ago, but the pony was restless, and I dared not leave him. So knowing they must come on by this road, I strove to wait patiently till they should join me. When I turned my head towards them again, Fifine, with trembling hands, was adjusting the bandage which covered the eyes of the soldier. As she aided him to rise, I saw he was wearied and worn to the last stage of weakness, and I perceived by his listless attitude of patience that the hope of recovering sight was far fainter in him than in her.

Up the steep bank, and on between the poplars into the road, she supported him with her firm arm, bearing him along as he leant on her in his weakness, heavily. Intent only on aiding him, seeing only him, she did not perceive me, till with the long reins in one hand, I held the other towards her.

"Fifine, I am here to help you. This carriage is for you and Félix, and I will lead the pony."

She burst into tears of joy; she could not utter a word to thank me, and when at last speech came, she could only talk of Félix.

"Ah, now, thank Heaven, he will be home to-night—he will be weary no more! And, Monsieur, a minute ago, he could *see*—think of that, he could see!"

"It was only for a moment," said Félix, with a wistful smile. "It is all dark again now, Monsieur."

I would say nothing in reply, but in my own heart I had great hope, from that momentary flash of sight.

It did me good to see the relief, the thankfulness, with which the poor invalid sank down upon the cushions of that uncouth tilbury.

I believe, but for this help, Fifine with all her courage and her strength, would never have brought him to Saint Hilaire. As it was, we made quite a triumphal procession as we entered the village about eight in the evening, I still leading the pony, and Josephine waving the handkerchief from beneath the hood of the queer little carriage.

I cannot describe the meeting between father, mother, and son. To English readers, it might appear strange, extravagant, an exaggeration of feeling. It is not all who know how far stronger and more sacred, abroad than at home, is that pure love which we call filial and parental.

The poor soldier fainted as his mother put her arms around him. This mingling of joy and sorrow, added to his pain and weakness, overcame him. When he recovered sense and speech, he placed Josephine's hand in his mother's. "Thank her, mother," he said; "I cannot."

In looking on the old couple, I saw in their age and feebleness the girl's reason for walking to Liège to fetch her lover. *Their* arms would have been of no use to him, their feeble steps could not have aided his. All were so poor that a vehicle was never thought of.

My story is nearly told. In a day or two, when Félix was rested, and seemed stronger, I fetched the good doctor from Saint Elmo to examine his eyes. The result was, as I had supposed, hopeful. Yet for many weeks it was only an anxious, uncertain hope; for if sight came back for a moment, it flitted away again like a shadow, leaving his darkness more depressing. But as strength and health returned, sight came gradually, not sight perhaps as he had once possessed it, but enough to make him happy and to earn his living.

Henri Lefèvre danced merrily at the wedding; love could scarcely touch so careless a heart, and it was he who claimed the first kiss of the bride's cheek, and wished her long life and happiness.



CARDS.

FEW among the many of us handling, from time to time, the figured pasteboard called a "playing card" ever bestow a thought as to its origin, and the circumstances which have formed cards to be one of the most distinguishing features of social life. And yet such considerations are worthy of attention, if only to afford indications of human impulse and ingenuity.

The historical point which marks the primary existence of cards is somewhat obscure as to absolute date of origin. Their ancient invention has been ascribed to the Asiatics, but the only ground for such surmise is based on a court record of the reign of Edward I. of England, which speaks of that monarch playing "the game of four kings," when in Syria. Again, the Romans have been, without reason, accredited with the introduction. But of this we may at least be certain, that cards were first positively used in Europe in the year 1275, as attested by numerous old writers, in their works. We find them mentioned in the *Stadtbuch* of Augsburg, 1275, where it is stated that Rudolph I. amused himself therewith. In Germany, indeed, they were general from the year 1286, and in Italy from 1299.

It is therefore manifest that the popular notion is erroneous which assigns the invention to the French in 1390, when, to divert the failing brain of Charles VI., cards were provided. An entry in the Treasury Registry gives 56 sols to one Jacquemin Gringinnier, painter, for three packs of cards, gilded and painted, for the king. Whether they were employed as a *gâme* is, nevertheless, doubtful. The French also name the reign of Charles V. for the date of origin, on the authority of the king's page, who mentions cards in his memoirs.

Like the monastic missals, cards were at first drawn and painted by hand, until the printing blocks were invented for stamping devices on the card. It would seem suggestive, as these same blocks now appear to us, that our forefathers here, 150 years before the actual introduction of the art of printing, halted on the very threshold of that glorious discovery.

It is interesting to trace the source, certainly French and Spanish, which called into existence each different "suit" in a pack of cards. The four suits originally symbolized the four great divisions of men, in their worldly estate. By the *coeurs* (hearts) are meant the choir-men or ecclesiastics, and therefore the Spaniards, early devotees to the game, have *copas* or chalices, instead of *hearts*. The nobility were represented by the ends or points of lances or pikes, which the English, in their version, vulgarly supposed to be *spades*. The Spaniards here again have *espadas* (swords). The merchants show

as "diamonds," which were intended to be square stones, tiles, and other merchandise of that class. The peasants and agriculturists lastly figure in the shape of the Trèfle (trefoil leaf or clover-grass); but how the English term of "clubs" became applied is certainly mysterious, unless, as imagined, it was borrowed from the Spanish, who have, for this suit, *bastos* (staves or clubs).

The "four kings" purported to be David, Alexander, Cæsar, and Charles, typifying the monarchies of the Jews, Greeks, Romans, and Franks under Charlemagne, and these names long continued to be stamped on the French cards. The "Queens" were Argine (anagram for *Regina*), Esther, Judith, and Pallas, *i.e.*, royal birth, piety, and wisdom. The "Knaves" implied attendants on knights, the old signification of "*Knave*" being servant. The chronicle runs that on the original French cards, two famous knights of the time were, themselves, designed.

It must, however, be borne in mind that the forms depicted on the ancient cards varied according to the artistic skill and feeling of the designer; for, at first, the outlines were made upon the before-mentioned blocks of wood, and stamped on the cards, the decorative portion being then filled in by hand. Of course, after the invention of engraving on copper, the graver performed that work.

Some very curious specimen packs of ancient cards have been, and doubtless still are, in the possession of antiquaries. The very "suits" are no longer explicable to us. Sketched with much elaboration of detail, is a King surrounded by Columbines, and called the "King of Columbines," which answered to our "Spades." Likewise the "Queen of Rabbits" (clubs), "Knaves of Pinks (diamonds), and the "Ace of Roses" (hearts). The other cards belonging to the pack, the points of which corresponded in number to the present, are also drawn in the form of flowers and animals. The four suits were also designed as *bells, hearts, leaves, and acorns*. Here again the "bells" signified the nobility, who attached those ornaments to their hunting hawks; the hearts (as before noticed) the ecclesiastics; the leaves, the gentry, by virtue of their landed estates, parks, trees, &c.; and the acorns, the farmers, on account of their agricultural pursuits. The figured cards which we call "court," no doubt derived their name, through corruption, from *coat* cards, that is to say, "coated" figures. This was an age of symbolism, when signs played the part of education; and if mediaevalism has done no more, it has at least taught us to respect their arts, efforts we may emulate, but cannot equal in result.

So popular with all classes did cards become, in the different countries of Europe, that the stern arm of the law was directed in suppressing them, the authorities classing the amusement with dicing, gaming, and such "nefarious practices." On their introduction into Spain in 1387, John I., king of Castile, promulgated an edict against cards, as did the Provost of Paris in 1397.

As a branch of trade in England, the manufacture of cards soon attained some importance, for we find Edward IV., in 1463, granting to the card makers of London a decree forbidding their import; and in the reign of Henry VII. they gained the height of fashionable esteem, the amount of £5, no mean sum in those days, being devoted by the Treasury to the purchase of a pack for the King's diversion. The people of England, until this reign, had enjoyed immunity from interference with regard to such games, but the monarch enacted a statute prohibiting the "apprentices" from indulging in the same, except during the Christmas holidays, and then only while under the roof of their respective masters. This was confirmed, with due severity, by Henry VIII. Repression of national sports must, however, necessarily be transitory, and as each generation passed away, the love of cards was transmitted in succession.

They became an indispensable adjunct to Christmas entertainments, and the squire of Queen Anne's time possessed, we are told, an almost superstitious regard for cards, never playing till the festive season came round, and then the family pack was produced from the mantel-piece, with due solemnity. Stevenson, an old writer of Charles the Second's time, says, "The country maid leaves half her market, and must be sent again, if she forgets a pack of cards on Christmas Eve."

To speak of the various games that delighted our ancestors would be a work in itself, but it may be remarked, in passing, that "Primero" (Spanish origin), prime trump, gresco, gleek—names now vanished from our vocabulary—were once much in vogue. Whist, or whisk, as formerly called, and which stands pre-eminent, is of comparatively recent origin, at least in our form of play. It has been thought to be derived from the old game of "trump," but the rules under which it was framed differed very materially from the modern. Mention is first made of whist in the "Beau's Stratagem," a play of Farquhar's, written in 1707, but we are informed that it was not earlier than one hundred years ago that the game began to be studied according to improved lights, by a party of players assembling at the Crown Coffee House, Bunhill Row, London.

It may interest some, not so acquainted, to read of the simple manner of making a "playing-card." The following particulars are from a reliable source.

Blocks are still used for the outlines of the card, but the characters are produced by the process designated "stencilling," *i.e.*, the device is formed by means of an oiled cloth or paper, in which apertures are cut representing spades, diamonds, &c. This is laid above the card, and then the surface of the stencil or pattern is painted over with a brush full of black or red water colour, gilding being done in the same way, excepting the use of gilders' size instead of colour, after which application the surface is powdered with gold

dust. The duty of 1s. per pack (now 3d.) produced in 1841 the sum of £9,223 10s., an appreciable item of Revenue receipts.

"Sharpers" are in the habit of manufacturing special marked cards for their own operations.

We cannot resist quoting, at the close of our remarks, a passage from Dean Swift's satirical "Lines on his own Death," where he describes the effect that the news of his demise would cause in the social circle of his quondam acquaintance, and more especially on his female friends. They are engrossed under the all-absorbing influence of cards, and their exclamations are thus happily anticipated:—

"The Dean is dead (pray what is trumps?)
The Lord have mercy on his soul,
(Ladies I venture for the vole)
Six Deans, they say, must bear the pall
(I wish I knew what king to call)."

The Dean, shrewd and bitter observer of men and manners, had in his eye the card tables of Queen Caroline's salon, of which the queen and her despicable consort, together with the court, were inordinately fond.

In conclusion, however, we cannot, with any reason, puritanically deprecate a game of cards. There is a time for everything, saith the preacher, and considering the capacity of man's nature for genuine amusement, so long as it remains uncontaminated by sordid motives, morality gains a support through relaxation, rather than sustains a shock.

Truly, if love of gain pervert the man, his amusement becomes mere money-changing, and no longer sport. If in England we were not so beset by privileged vampires, who lure on the tempted, we might enjoy the blessing of a pure "turf," athletics in all branches, conducted under auspices worthy of classic traditions, and national games exhibiting their champions in the light of heroes, rather than, as is too often the case, that of authorized rogues bearing the specious hall mark of "Sport." Endeavours to effect this would not be tilting at windmills, but in the end, veritable reform for the weal of the community.



HOME AT LAST.

BY LOIS SELBON.

MY Uncle Selby's was a strange home to choose for a delicate boy of twelve. I have often wondered since whether, had my mother lived, she would have sent me to be an inmate of her eldest brother's house. She had scarcely heard anything of him or his doings since he had left their country home to set up in London as a solicitor. This had been long before her own marriage. In those days communication was not what it is now; members of families were easily lost sight of in the far-away metropolis if one or the other did not especially care to be remembered.

I had a sad limp in my gait. It was to try and cure this that I was sent up to London to be under the famous surgeon of that day. Quiet old Bucklersbury, in the heart of the city, was the place my uncle had chosen for his residence from the first, and in it I still found him, when I arrived at my destination one dreary October evening in the year 18—. It was an eminently respectable little street, much favoured by bankers, who still lived in their banking-houses at the time I am writing of. Its respectability was only equalled by its gloomy dullness; yet the outward gloom was as nothing compared with the inner dreariness of my uncle's house. Even a child could feel how oppressive was the moral atmosphere of John Selby's home.

On the very first morning after my arrival, I made a rather curious discovery. The room assigned to me was at the tip-top of the house; and when Rachel, the confidential servant and cross-grained factotum of the house, conducted me up to it on first getting to Bucklersbury, I thought we must be climbing up a tower. She assured me, however, that it was only "the attics" we were bound for.

"We put you up here to be more comfortable-like, Master Ruthven. Master and Mistress hates all kinds of noise; but here you can please yourself and make as much racketing as you please—though I suppose they forgot your lame leg. I'm afraid you'll find that rather awkward in these high houses." And she left me for the night.

Rachel did not tell me at what time I had to be down to breakfast, so when I awoke next morning to the sound of Bow Church clock chiming eight, I jumped up in haste, lest I should be reproved for being late. We were early folks at the Rectory at home, and my father always expected me to have done a good hour's Latin before the eight o'clock breakfast. As soon as I was ready, I peeped out. There was only just light enough struggling in through the stairc se window to show what a very dark, foggy morning it was, and there

was not a soul to be seen or heard. "They must be at breakfast already," I said to myself, and began to descend the stairs.

Having got down two flights, I found myself close to the door—as I supposed—of the room where Rachel had given me my supper on the previous night, whilst Uncle John had asked me questions about home, and Aunt Matilda had hardly taken any notice of me at all. I opened the door in some trepidation, walked in, and saw my mistake in a moment. The window was uncurtained and the room comparatively light, so that I could take in its principal features at a glance.

Before leaving home, my father had told me there were no children at uncle Selby's: yet here, on a low couch, sat a whole row of dolls, with their house and all its appurtenances on a table before them. Besides this, there were balls and toys of various kinds neatly stowed away on the shelves of a low cupboard with glass doors, which stood opposite the window, immediately below a large picture. This picture excited my curiosity more than all the rest, for it was covered with a black crape veil, so thick that it was impossible to distinguish anything beneath it.

"Very odd," I thought, "no children, and all these toys; and that great picture—how I should like to have a peep under that black stuff! I must ask Rachel all about it."

With which resolution I left the room, and forgot to shut the door behind me. As there was still no sound to be heard in the house, I made my way upstairs again, not caring to venture further without a guide. On the top landing I met Rachel coming down.

"Why, bless me! wherever are you a-coming from, Master Fairley?" she exclaimed in surprise.

"I have been down to try and find the breakfast room, and ——"

"You couldn't find it, I suppose—for the best reason that there isn't one. They dine and breakfast and live all in the same room here—not that it was always so, though. It's the one you were in last night. There is a drawing-room, but——"

Here Rachel stopped suddenly. We had got to the door of the room I had just been in. Turning very white, and staring at the door, she whispered: "Who opened that door? I must have forgotten to take out the key last night—who can have been in there?"

"I have, Rachel," I said at once. "I went in by mistake. Outside it looked just like the room you took me into last night. And, Rachel, I want so much to know all about it—do tell me——"

But Rachel did not hear. She had slid away to the door, which she closed noiselessly, and slipped the key into her pocket. Then she drew me downstairs after her—down, down, down to the very depths of the staircase, which got darker and darker, and ended in the kitchen. If it had been like climbing up a tower the night before, it seemed—to the country lad—just like going down into a well this morning.

Once arrived at the bottom, Rachel closed a door, and then grasping me tightly by the wrist, she said solemnly in a deep whisper, as if she might be overheard even here: "Promise me faithfully, Master Ruthven, that you will *never* try that door again, and that you will *never* tell your uncle and aunt that you have been inside it. I am telling you for your own good. You would make the place too hot to hold you, if you could not keep from chattering."

I promised, feeling very uncomfortable and guilty, and yet not knowing what it was I had done. Rachel scanned my face narrowly: apparently she was satisfied with what she saw, for she bid me follow her upstairs again, and then showed me that the general sitting-room was immediately under the forbidden one, the landings being exactly alike. It was, in fact, the back drawing-room; the front room was never used excepting on Sunday afternoons, when, for some unaccountable reason, my aunt always insisted upon our sitting in it for several weary hours.

I used to think this was intended as a penance for not going to church in the evening, which we never did in winter, and very rarely in the summer. The room was several degrees gloomier and drearier than the rest of the house; and it certainly did not add to the pleasure of those Sunday afternoons, that Uncle Selby always came and sat with us. I often thought that he kept a furtive watch upon his wife, though why I could not fathom. She hardly ever went out, and never without him; and if he chanced to find her absent from the sitting-room, he generally went in search of her, under one pretext or another.

As time wore on, I got accustomed to my surroundings: to the gloomy house and fog-encrusted windows—which Rachel's occasional rubbings never seemed to brighten—to my aunt's far-away look, and to my uncle's hard, sharp manner. Perhaps the monotony was good for my "cure." I soon began to feel a change for the better, and the doctor pronounced himself quite satisfied with my progress. What with that, and reading for an hour or two a day with a neighbouring clergyman, and an occasional outing with Cousin Jack, my life was by no means an unhappy one.

Our little party had been augmented by the arrival of Cousin Jack about a week after I got to Bucklersbury. He appeared quite unexpectedly one evening, saying that he had been detained by business much longer than he had expected, and hoped that his father and mother had not felt uneasy about him. Jack Selby was about five-and-twenty when I first saw him. Tall and good-looking, with a pleasant, taking way about him. Yet had I been old enough to criticise, I should have seen the weakness in the well-cut lips, and an occasional hesitation in the large dark eyes, before looking a questioner straight in the face.

But how my aunt brightened up on Jack's return! And even his father greeted him with a kind of pride.

"We always know you have some good reason for not getting back as soon as we could wish, Jack," he said; and my aunt added with more energy than usual, "Yes, yes; Jack is always to be trusted; thank God for it!" And she looked at him as affectionately as those deep-set eyes could look.

Jack, however, did not answer, but busied himself about his supper. Rachel was the only one who did not seem to care for the new comer, and looked her severest when she brought him some tea; vouchsafing no answer when Jack bade her good evening, and added jokingly that she grew more sweet-tempered-looking each time he came home.

Cousin Jack was very kind to me, and used sometimes to take me to the play. There we were always joined by some of his friends—amongst them a woman, to whom I took an intense dislike at first sight. She was handsome, tall, and not very young, with a high colour in her cheeks and glittering black eyes, that always made me feel uncomfortable when she fastened them upon me. Yet she was very kind to me, and I could not tell why I almost hated her. She was very familiar with Jack, who called her "Madge," and she always spoke of my uncle and aunt as "those stupid old fogies at home," which I resented greatly.

"It's no use talking about the people you see when I take you out, Ruthven," Jack had said to me, after our first evening together, "they would never understand it at home; and besides, you know, they are perfectly satisfied if you are with me." Which was quite true. Again, Rachel was the only one who occasionally said something about its "not being good for delicate lads to be out so late," but she was always silenced immediately by my aunt. "Be quiet, Rachel, and do not talk nonsense. You know as well as I do that nothing can be better for the boy than being with Mr. Jack," she would say.

"But I don't know nothing of the kind," I heard the woman mutter to herself one day, after Mrs. Selby had rebuked her as usual, and then turned away. "He's no better than he should be, I'll take my oath upon it; and there's that sainted angel——" Here she probably remembered that I was within ear-shot, for she stopped suddenly, leaving me to think over her mutterings and wonder what they meant.

There seemed to be very little business going on in Uncle Selby's office, which occupied two of the rooms on the ground floor: the third being a little library, of which I had the run. But then there was no one to do anything but my uncle and Jack, who was so often absent. Besides these two there was only a boy who came in for a few hours a day, to carry out letters and do the various errands of the firm. I soon found out that my uncle had a most extraordinary antipathy to clerks, and would not have one in the house.

One afternoon I was hunting up a book in the library. The doors

between the rooms were open, as usual ; I could see my uncle sitting at his table, and Jack lounging against the window, when I looked across to the door occasionally during my search. In a little while I heard uncle Selby complain to Jack about his being kept away from Bucklersbury so often, so that he, the man getting into years, had to do all the home-work alone.

"Well, father, you ought to keep a clerk again, as you used to do before—before you dismissed them all three. The business has never flourished since. It was a great mistake —"

"Silence !" thundered my uncle. "How dare *you* talk to me of clerks, Jack ? you who know the reason why I will rather starve than have another in the house."

"You know I shall never agree with you, sir, on that point ; and, believe me, you will be sorry for it some day." And then he seemed to wait for an answer ; but, as no answer came, he spoke again. This time there was an evident hesitation in his manner, very different from his usual fluency.

"By-the-bye, sir," he began, "I received a letter this morning, which I think you ought to see —"

At this point my uncle pushed back his chair with an energetic movement, boding no good to Jack's communication.

"What are you driving at now, Jack ?" he asked. "Take care what you are about." And there was a sharp ring in his voice not pleasant to hear.

"I repeat, you ought to read it yourself, sir ; it is enough to melt a heart of stone, father—she is —"

But here my uncle burst forth in a frenzy of rage : "She ! How dare you, sir ! How dare you insult your father ! Leave the room instantly—and remember," he added, bringing out each word slowly, with the weight of concentrated fury—"mention that subject once more, and you never set foot in it again—no, nor in the house either—not if your mother were to go down on her knees to me for you. And you know by this time that I keep my word ; don't you ?"

Jack quietly went to the door, but before leaving the room he turned, and this time he looked my uncle full and straight in the face. "Father," he said, solemnly, "mark my words ; you will rue this day, even more than that other day !"

Then he went. Another moment, and the house-door shut behind him with a bang. Uncle Selby locked his door, and I crept upstairs as noiselessly as possible.

Jack was not heard of for more than a week, and I noticed that my aunt was much more uneasy than usual about him.

"I cannot understand Jack's not coming home," she said one evening, after she had been expecting him in vain all day. "He always tells me when he is going to stay away over night, and this time he did not even wish me good-bye. Do you know where he is, John ?" And I was struck by the unusual softness in her voice.

"I have not the remotest idea of his whereabouts, Matilda," was uncle Selby's unconcerned reply. "He is not away on business that I know of."

"Not away on business!" repeated my aunt, in a startled voice; then why is he away? Is anything wrong? Oh, John," and she got up and laid her hand almost caressingly on her husband's shoulder: "Oh, John, you and he have not quarrelled, surely?" she asked, pleadingly.

"Certainly not, Matilda. Calm yourself. I never *quarrel* with my children. They either obey me, and we get on pleasantly together, or they disobey me and—leave the house. Surely you ought to have learnt that by this time." And his eyes gleamed dangerously, though his lips were almost smiling. "Jack will come back. Perhaps tonight; who knows?"

My aunt sighed heavily as she returned to her chair, with the old stony look in her face; but she said no more.

The week went by, and still no signs of Jack. My aunt got to have a fixed look of anxious expectation in her face, which I think irritated uncle Selby, for he was sharper with her than usual at this time.

Sunday came round, and as heretofore, the afternoon had to be spent in the gloomy drawing-room. I had long managed a seat for myself in a corner of one of the windows, so that I could occasionally give a glance into the street outside, without being noticed either by my uncle or aunt. Little enough there was to see at any time, still it was better than counting the flowers on the wall, or improving the ugly patterns of the chintz covers with an imaginary pencil. I had done both so many hundreds of times. Whilst pretending to read, therefore, I peeped out.

On this particular afternoon there seemed not to be a living being about. A small sprinkling of snow was still left on the ground from the morning, when it had been bright and frosty. But now the sky was overcast, and the air felt cold and raw, as the wind came howling round the corners in gusts. It seemed particularly fierce over the way, at the entrance of the little flagged foot-path—a short cut into the crowded thoroughfares beyond, from which the incessant roar and din came floating over to our quiet nook. Whilst watching the vagaries of the wind in piling up and then blowing to pieces a heap of straw and dust at this particular corner, I thought I saw something moving within the deep shadow of the high houses. By and bye I became aware that a human form was crouching there, and as at last it emerged from the gloom into the waning light of the short January day, I saw that it was a woman.

She was young, and but thinly and scantily clad. As the dust-heap by her side was shaken to pieces by the wind rushing up between the houses behind her, I could see how the blast pierced her and shook the poor frame mercilessly. When first I caught sight of

her, her hands were crossed upon her breast, as if to keep in all the warmth they could ; but as she stepped forward in the direction of my very window, she suddenly clasped them, and held them a little way from her, as she looked up imploringly. Another sharp tussle with the wind, and her bonnet was blown back, disclosing a face so white and wan that it haunted me in my dreams long after. It bore the traces of great beauty, and the long chestnut hair, which the wind blew hither and thither so pitilessly, was lovely still.

I gazed down spell-bound ; but for the hair, the figure was so shadowy and unreal. Gazing still, I saw her move forward a few steps, then stumble, but quickly recover herself, and walk towards our house more slowly. Suddenly she lifted her clasped hands, threw back her head, and then fell flat on her face, dyeing the snow around her with a dark purple stain. At last the spell was broken.

I jumped up to give what help I could to the poor forlorn creature, when at the same instant I felt myself pressed back into my seat by a hand of iron, whilst a voice hissed into my ear : "Don't stir or speak, or I shall kill you !" And then I knew that my uncle had been watching it all, close to me.

Paralyzed with fear and astonishment, I at first lost all power over my limbs and tongue, but in a minute sympathy with the poor thing in the snow outside, and indignation at my uncle's brutality, gave me back my voice. "Let me go, sir," I cried ; "did you not see her fall ? She may be dying at this moment !" And I tried to shake off the powerful grasp on my shoulder. But I was a weakly lad, and could not free myself easily.

My uncle had just raised his hand to strike me, when his attention was suddenly directed from me to his wife. My struggle to get free had roused her from the doze she had fallen into early in the afternoon. Now she was standing upright, looking like a sleep-walker. With her eyes fixed upon some object far away, she began to glide towards the window. Letting go of me, my uncle sprang towards his wife, and tried to force her back on to the couch. Seizing my opportunity, I was outside the door in an instant, calling loudly to Rachel to come and help.

I never could remember how I got downstairs or into the road ; I only know that before another minute had passed I found myself kneeling beside the prostrate woman in the snow, trying to lift her and get her into a sitting position : but all in vain. A shriek made me look up. There stood my aunt at the drawing-room window, staring wildly at us, whilst her husband was trying to force her back.

"But I will see her," she cried. "I have not called her back ; I have kept my promise. But now she has come of herself—my child !—my Ethel—come home !—come home at last !" And then my uncle succeeded in closing the window. Meanwhile Rachel

had come flying out of the house, calling to me as she ran. Then catching sight of the face of the poor thing I was endeavouring to help, she threw herself down by her side in the snow.

"It's Miss Ethel," she cried; "my darling Miss Ethel, my pet!" Then putting her arm tenderly round the poor worn-out body: "Look up, Miss Ethel, dear; it's Rachel, your poor old nurse, speaking to you." But the eyes did not unclose. "How cold she is! She must be got into the house at once. Quick, Master Ruthven, try and take her feet, and we will manage it between us."

"Let her lie," thundered my uncle's voice from the office window. "She willed it so herself; now she must abide by it."

"What, in the face of this!" broke out Rachel. "You, who drove her to it by your unkindness—and I don't care who hears me say it. She has been happier, I'll be bound, with the poor clerk she loved than she would have been with the rich old horror you tried to force upon her!"

Before my uncle could recover from his astonishment at the woman's audacity, a voice behind us said authoritatively: "Don't stand talking here; she must be carried into the house instantly; I take the responsibility upon myself. There, Rachel and Ruthven, lay hold together, and don't slip in the snow. Gently, gently!"

With which words, Jack—for it was no other than he, come back quite unexpectedly, with intentions of his own—lifted his sister's body from the ground, and bore her into the house.

Into the house and up the stairs we carried our light burden—up and up: not a word was spoken, but as if by common consent Jack and Rachel halted outside the forbidden door.

"Open it wide, Ruthven; she shall lie in her own room once more after the two long years that have passed!" and I made way for the three.

There, in the middle of the room, stood my aunt, evidently expecting us. There was nothing visible of her late struggle but an unnaturally bright feverish look in the eyes. She stretched out her arms: "Ethel, my child! my precious child! Home again at last! I knew you would come—I have been waiting for you, dear. Look, the room is quite ready for you."

Then kneeling down beside the couch, where we had placed her daughter, she went on more excitedly:

"See, darling, the crape is gone; I tore it down myself just now, after he left me alone. Your father had it put up to hide your bonnie face, dear, but now we shall be happy again together. It was all his fault. He tried to make me hate you, but I never did, though I let him think I had forgotten!" and my poor aunt laughed nervously, a miserable laugh to hear.

At last we persuaded her to go into the next room for a few minutes with Jack and me, whilst the doctor, whom Rachel had sent for at once, came in to look at his patient. When she grew quieter,

Jack returned to the sick room, and presently came out on to the landing with the medical man.

"She is not dead," I heard the latter say, "but dying, I fear. I hardly think she will be conscious again, but she may be, though I greatly doubt it. You may want me again, so I will not leave the house at once."

"Mother," said Jack, very gently, leaving the doctor to go down alone, and coming in to us—"mother: she may want to see you, but you must be very quiet with her—will you promise?"

"Only let me go to her, Jack, and you shall see how quiet I can be," and then we led her in, and she knelt down in her old place.

For some time there was a dead silence in the room, broken at last by a quick little sigh from the sick woman; then the eyelids began to quiver, and the slightest tinge of colour came into the hollow cheeks. "Allen," she murmured presently, "is it time? Must you go?" Then louder, "Oh, mother! Where are you, mother?" and as a look of pain passed over her face, Rachel stroked her hand soothingly and asked: "What is it, darling?" "My dream," the sick woman murmured again: "horrible!" and she shivered. "Turned away from home, and then left alone—" Here she suddenly opened her eyes wide, sat up with unexpected strength, glanced from one to the other, then at her picture, and passed her hand across her forehead. "At home! In the old room! But how?" she called out in painful bewilderment. Then catching sight of the bowed head by her side, which never stirred—"Oh! mother, mother! I see it all now; forgive me for leaving you!" and she sank back exhausted.

"My darling!"

The mother raised herself and put her arms round her child's neck for a moment, but at a glance from Jack returned to her former position. After a short silence, the sick woman spoke again: "Father—where is he? I would bid him good-bye." And Jack ran down at once to fetch up uncle, who had shut himself up in the library. It took some minutes to persuade him to open the door, and then it was only the doctor's warning that a minute more might be too late, that made him consent to come at last.

"Father," said the dying woman, sitting up again with Rachel's help, "I want to say good-bye—here in the old room, where you used to be so kind to your poor little Ethel. Forgive me, father, for the pain I have caused you." She stretched out her thin white hand; but as no answer came, she went on in broken sentences: "I am going to baby, father—he went a week to-day—better so—we had not bread to eat—Allen was so far away—gone to make a home for us in America—you know best why he could find no work here—" and Ethel's voice grew stronger, and a shadow of rising indignation passed over her face, but only for a moment, whilst the father's head bent lower in shame and sudden remorse.

Pressing her hand to her side, the sick woman spoke again, but this time her voice was weaker, and her breathing became more painful: "It lasted too long—too long—you will be kind to Allen—to your poor child's husband, when he comes back and finds us gone? He will find work then—perhaps here in his old place," she continued dreamily, and a wan little smile flitted across her face. "Jack knows—I wrote to Jack—but I gave no address—I had none to give—Allen was a good husband and tried to do for the best—dear Allen!"

She lay back with her eyes shut, and her mind seemed to wander again. When she reopened her eyes her father had sunk down on his knees beside his wife, quite overpowered with misery and grief. "Ethel," he gasped in his mental agony—"Ethel, I was blinded by some evil spirit—can you forgive your unhappy father?"

With her last remaining strength the dying woman laid her wasted hands on the two bent heads before her: "I forgive, as I hope to be forgiven." Then: "Father, mother, Jack—God bless you all!" After a moment's silence, she slightly raised her head, and seemed to fix her eyes on something invisible to us. "I am coming," she said in low distinct tones: "I am coming—Allen! Allen, my only love, I must go. Baby is there, calling for me!" And she sank back dead. Another blood vessel had burst.

The poor mother took no notice of anything around her—only went on stroking the cold white hand. At last Rachel, the tears streaming down her face, persuaded her to leave the room with her.

Then Jack spoke for the first time, after helping my uncle to a chair, into which he sank, a truly pitiable object in his son's eyes. "Father," said Jack, very sadly, "I came home this afternoon with my heart full of bitterness and anger towards you. But once more—God knows how unexpectedly—the peacemaker came as of old between me and the revengeful words I fully meant to say," and he glanced lovingly at the sweet dead face. "Would that I could keep from you the confession I have to make. But it cannot be. As we have made our lives, so must we bear them to the end. You believe me, father, when I say that I would spare you if I could?"

My uncle bowed his head in token of assent. Jack resumed.

"I have deceived you sadly for years past. Often when you thought I was kept away on business, I was only spending my time in idleness and pleasure. But when once my good angel had left the house, and there was no Ethel to confide in, and help me with her gentle reproof and advice, I plunged headlong into dissipation. Anything was welcome that made me forget the change at home. I became entangled with—" he paused, then added between his teeth: "Well, no matter—she is my wife now, and I must shield her as best I can."

"Your wife!" gasped my uncle, taking in the words, low as they

were, and roused by a sudden sense of a new misery. "You are married?"

"Yes, I am married," came the answer, gloomily enough. "I gave in to Madge's persistency on the day you threatened to make me follow Ethel, if ever I should mention her again!"

My uncle groaned heavily. Jack looked sadly at him.

"And, father," he began again, as if speaking were a heavy burden to him, "I cannot bring her here: it would not do for mother; yet, where poor Madge is, there must I be, too; she is my wife—so this can nevermore be home of mine again!" And after a pause: "I must go at once; she is not far from here at this very moment."

He strode over to the couch, and pressed his lips to the pure white forehead. "Farewell, Ethel, my good angel always! Would I were lying here instead of you!" And he passed his hand lightly over the wavy hair. "I will be back again, father, to follow her to her last resting-place," he said, with a great anguish in his voice, as he wrung his father's hand before quitting the room and the house.

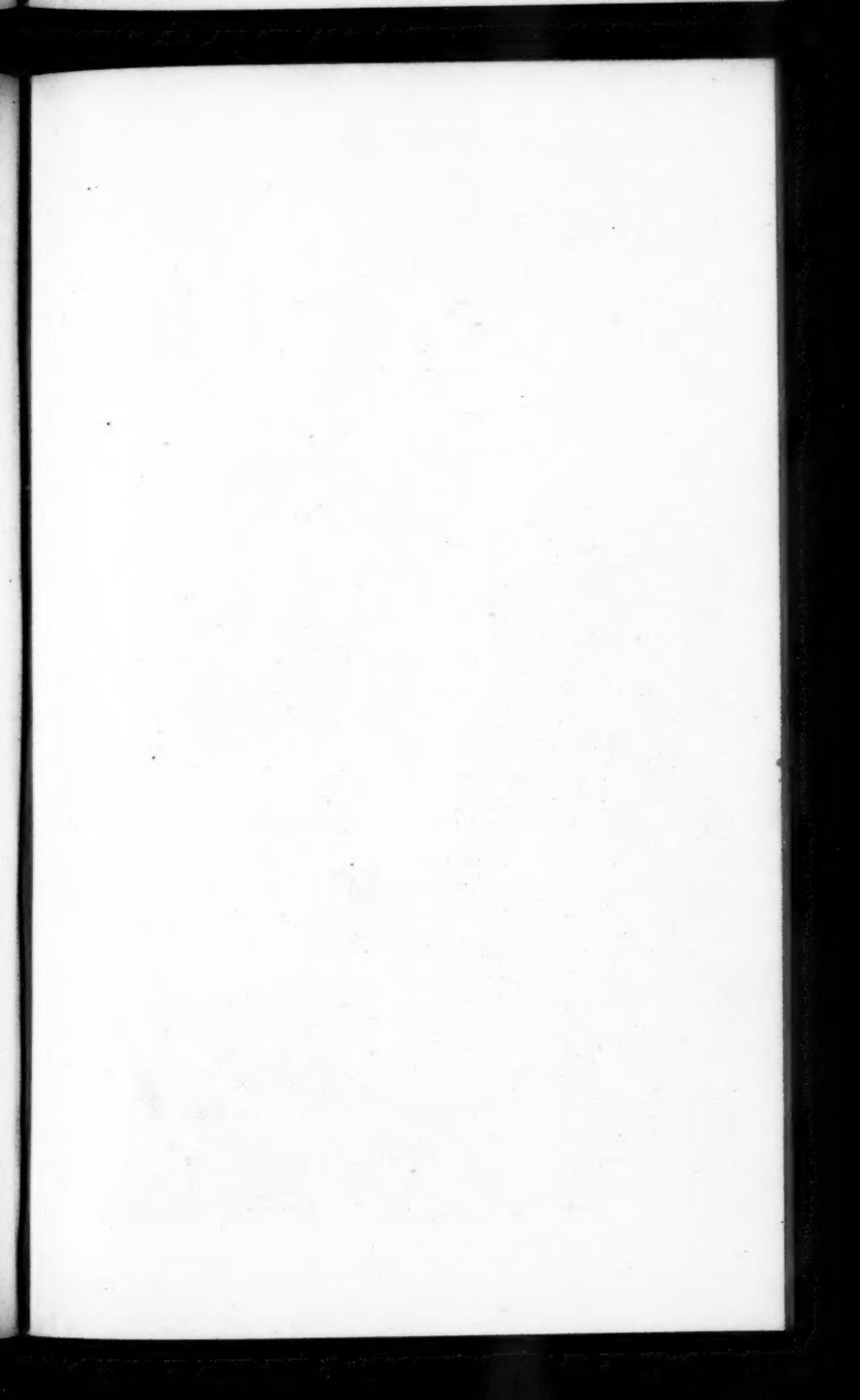
"Two at once—two lost at once—hard, hard! God help me!" I heard my uncle murmur when, a little later, the doctor led him from the room, grown old in the space of an hour.

The next morning found my poor aunt harmlessly but hopelessly insane. She lived for some years, attended by the faithful Rachel. Her only pleasure and occupation consisted in dusting and arranging Ethel's dolls and toys, and looking at her picture.

My uncle is still alive, though very old and infirm. His home is far away from Bucklersbury. The house has long since been pulled down, without leaving a trace of the gloomy old structure behind it. Jack came back to him after his wife died and he was free once more. He is a childless and solitary man, trying to atone for the past by unwearied attention to his father, now fast approaching the land where he hopes to meet his Ethel once more.

And none save Jack and I know what the old man means when he murmurs to himself: "She came home at last—only came home to die—but she forgave me first! Thank God for it!"







RE. AND H. TAYLOR.

STOLEN.

M. ELLEN EDWARDS.